Scottish Birds

published by the
SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

VOLUME 41(1) MARCH 2021

Scottish Birds

Established in 1958.

Published quarterly by:
The Scottish Ornithologists' Club,
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To advertise in *Scottish Birds* or obtain back issues, please contact Waterston House.

Designed and typeset by:
Pica Design, 51 Charlton Crescent,
Aboyne, Aberdeenshire AB34 5GN.
Email: picades@ifb.co.uk

Printed by:
Swallowtail Print Limited,
Unit 2 Drayton Industrial Park,
Taverham Road, Drayton
Norwich, Norfolk NR8 6RL.

Front Cover:
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Balephuil,
Tiree, Argyll, 17 September 2020.
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ISSN 0036-9144

Scottish Birds is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

Containing original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, topical articles, bird observations, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings, alongside branch and Club-related news, our members tell us that *Scottish Birds* is one of the key benefits of belonging to the SOC. Its different sections have been developed to meet the wide needs of the birdwatching community, and the publication is renowned for its first-class photography.

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications including the *Scottish Bird Report* online.

More about the SOC...

On the one hand, a birdwatching club. Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 15 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 3,000. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

On the other, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds. The data we collect is made available to conservationists, planners and developers, and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning.

Club Headquarters can be found at Waterston House, Aberlady, overlooking the scenic local nature reserve. Housed within, is the George Waterston Library, the largest ornithological library in Scotland, and the Donald Watson Gallery - one of the jewels in the Waterston House crown, exhibiting wildlife art all year-round.

Join us...

As well as receiving *Scottish Birds* every quarter, SOC members have access to a programme of talks and outings across Scotland and affiliation to a local branch of the Club. New members will receive a welcome pack on joining, plus a thank you gift if paying their subscription by direct debit.

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For more information about the Club and its activities, including details of how to join, please visit www.the-soc.org.uk or contact Waterston House on 01875 871 330, or email membership@the-soc.org.uk

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Business as unusual

Plate 1. Ian Bainbridge Winter birding in Bulgaria; if only! © *Carole Bainbridge*

Writing this in early February in Lockdown 3, shortly after getting my first COVID-19 vaccination (a rare trip out and an excuse to see my first Bar-tailed Godwits for ages in Kirkcudbright Bay!), I have to reflect that 2020 has been very much business *not* as usual. Lockdowns have meant a series of interruptions to Club activities – conferences, meetings, training courses to name but three, and to all of our own birding activities as well. It is hard to see when we might return to something approaching normal, and the Club has had to continue making difficult decisions about what we may be able to undertake and achieve in 2021.

We have agreed it is prudent to postpone all our face-to-face events until the autumn, and of course, Waterston House is closed until further notice, until lockdown restrictions ease. The spring conference to be hosted by the Moray Branch is being held over until 2022 but we hope you'll be able to join us and our BTO colleagues for virtual conference sessions during late March instead. The staff are keeping the show on the road, working from home and we have welcomed Jane back from maternity leave, which will give a boost to our development and communications activities.

Branches have continued their winter programmes of talks; we congratulate them and Kathryn and Rosie at HQ for organising Zoom meetings with guest speakers. Generally, the turnout and feedback has been excellent; in January, Lothian Branch exceeded our Zoom capacity of 100! Zooming is not for everyone and some of the social interaction is lost but it does benefit members who would not normally be able to attend the talks because they are remote from the venue, as far away as Spain and the USA! While we hope to be able to resume face-to-face meetings from September, we also plan to continue a virtual programme; and maybe a combination of the two will prove to be the future normal...

In times like this, *Scottish Birds* continues to be especially valuable for the Club, and in the coming months we will explore the possibilities of publishing it online, in tandem with the print version. This, though, is the last issue with Ian Andrews at the helm as Co-ordinating Editor, and we all offer our sincere thanks to Ian for the fantastic job he has done with *SB* over the years. Stan, Harry and Stuart are now being joined by incoming volunteers Mark Wilkinson, Andrew Barker, John Frank, Lucy Hoad, Bridget Khursheed, Ed Austin and Jean Torrance. More about the new arrangements in June's issue, and Council is grateful to the new team members for joining in this important work.

In December, I mentioned that we are also looking for a new Treasurer. That search continues, so please think whether this might be something you or a friend could do to help the SOC thrive and grow over the coming years.

So, don't get too glum over lockdown; spring is round the corner, the Great Spotted Woodpeckers are drumming and the Green Woodpeckers are yaffling, it'll get warmer soon and the migrants will be arriving, so let's look forward to spring birding and a better 2021.

Ian Bainbridge, SOC President.

Movements of naturalised Barnacle Geese ringed in Strathspey

C. MITCHELL, D. MACDONALD, B. BATES & R. PINK

Moulting naturalised Barnacle Geese were caught in Strathspey at the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland's Highland Wildlife Park, Kincraig in July 2014 to 2017 and at Cromdale in July 2016 and 2017. Sightings away from the ringing sites during the non-breeding season from 2014/15 to 2017/18 showed that at least 61 (42.4%) of the birds wintered on the Solway Firth and eight (5.6%) in south Cumbria. Twelve (8.3%) of the marked birds were seen on spring migration in northern Norway, having joined the Svalbard population. Three birds were seen in northern Norway in May but were either seen or caught again in Strathspey in July of the same year. One Strathspey bird was shot in Iceland having joined the Greenland population. However, 19 (13.2%) of the birds were never seen after ringing. At the Highland Wildlife Park, in the year after ringing, on average, 68.9% of adults and 55.4% of goslings were either seen or re-caught in Strathspey. There is need for a management plan for the population and suggestions for future research are made.

Introduction

The world range of the Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* (IUCN status: least concern, Birdlife International 2015) comprises three main migratory populations: the North Russian/Baltic breeding population which winters in The Netherlands and north Germany and currently numbers *c.* 1.2 million individuals (Fox & Leafloor 2018); the north-east Greenland population that winters almost exclusively in north and west Scotland and west Ireland and numbers *c.* 81,000 birds (Mitchell & Hall 2018) and the Svalbard breeding population which winters on the Solway Firth, Scotland/England and numbers *c.* 40,000 birds (L. Griffin pers. comm.).

The Russian-based population is by far the largest, with a nesting range traditionally centred on Novaya Zemlya, Kolguyev, and Vaigach (all *c.* 71°N) and wintering on the European mainland mainly in Germany and The Netherlands. Within three decades, this population underwent a dramatic change in breeding range and numbers through colonisation of new breeding areas to the south-west of their original breeding grounds (Ganter *et al.* 1999). In 1971, the first breeding pair was found in the Baltic (Larsson *et al.* 1988), and this population has since grown rapidly (Larsson & van der Jeugd 1998). More recently, a breeding population was established in the south-west of The Netherlands, also growing rapidly (van der Graaf *et al.* 2006). In addition, there are now several groups of largely naturalised Barnacle Geese both in continental Europe and in the UK. For example, according to the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), there are 15 sites in the UK that support more than 100 naturalised birds that are present all year round, the largest flock being of over 500 birds on the Humber Estuary (north-east England). However, in Scotland, according to WeBS data, there are very few free-flying naturalised flocks. The origins of the introduced-breeding (naturalised) goose flocks include small numbers of geese that have been deliberately released, or have accidentally escaped from private wildfowl collections. Other flocks may have become established from injured, wild migratory birds that over-summered in an area, bred and their offspring returned to their natal areas. Wild migratory birds may also have joined naturalised flocks and abandoned their natural migration. In many cases, the origins or provenance of naturalised flocks are, however, unknown.

At the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland's Highland Wildlife Park (hereafter HWP), near Kincraig, Inverness-shire (57°N 4°W) a flock of up to *c.* 100 full-winged, naturalised Barnacle Geese has become established. Captive Barnacle Geese, whose wings were pinioned, rendering them flightless, were introduced to the HWP from the late 1970s through to 1991 (H. Armour pers. comm.). These came from a variety of sources including private captive collections, but the original provenance of the birds is unknown. The introduced geese bred at the HWP but any goslings produced remained full-winged and were able to fly freely. The original captive birds have all died and, by 2014, the flock of geese were all fully winged and left the site each autumn, returning in April each spring. Breeding now takes place annually. A second breeding site was located in 2012 by BB near Cromdale (57.3°N 3.5°W), 35 km to the north-east of the HWP, downstream on the River Spey and comprised 30–40 birds. These are the only regular moulting flocks of Barnacle Geese in the Highland, Moray & Nairn and North-East Scotland recording areas, although occasional birds, often singles or pairs, are encountered during the summer months (P. Stronach, M. Cook & I. Francis pers. comm.). The aim of the present study was to determine where the Strathspey geese moved to during the non-breeding season, return rates to the original ringing site and any evidence of movements between the two breeding sites.

Methods

The Barnacle Geese were caught during their annual wing moult in July. Adult geese are flightless for approximately 3–4 weeks, generally at the time that goslings are growing their flight feathers. A team of up to 12 personnel was involved in each catch. Part of the team erected a temporary netted corral using bamboo canes and 100 m of 1 m high meshed netting. Once the temporary corral was erected, all team members walked towards the moulting geese keeping to a loose line, gently herding the geese towards the temporary corral. Once the geese were safely trapped in the corral, a holding pen was erected. The pen had sides made of soft, dark opaque material and was *c.* 2.5 m square with 1 m high walls (Plate 2). Once erected, the geese were gently walked from the netted corral to the holding pen. Small goslings were removed from the holding pen and housed in a separate holding pen (*c.* 75 cm x 75 cm x 4 m) with individual compartments. This was to prevent the smaller goslings being trampled by adults in the main holding pen. Each bird was then sexed (through cloacal eversion) and fitted with a unique metal BTO ring. Most of the geese were also fitted with a blue plastic engraved ring marked with two white characters. The geese were then released in batches with goslings being released with adults.

Plate 2. Naturalised Barnacle Geese (and one Greylag Goose *Anser anser*) caught during the annual wing moult in July 2014 at the Highland Wildlife Park, Kincraig. © *P. Mitchell*

Re-encounters with the ringed Barnacle Geese comprised sightings of colour-ringed birds in the field made by members of the public, sightings at the HWP (by CM) and Cromdale (by BB) during the summer, recoveries of birds found dead and re-encounters at subsequent moult catches where ringed birds could be examined in the hand.

Results

Between 2014 and 2017, six catches were made in July, four at the HWP and two at Cromdale. We attempted to catch all the geese present at each site, although some non-breeding birds had already grown their flight feathers and evaded capture. In all six catches, we estimated that >90% of the geese present at each site were caught. In total, 274 Barnacle Geese were caught; 158 birds were newly ringed, of which 144 (89.4%) were also fitted with plastic leg rings, and 116 were retraps (birds originally caught in a previous year) (Table 1). Nineteen (13.2%) of the 144 colour-ringed geese were not seen or caught again after ringing, although this included 11 birds that were marked in July 2017 and sightings of these birds may occur in the future.

Table 1. Catches of naturalised Barnacle Geese in Strathspey in 2014 to 2017.

Date	Place	Number of Barnacle Geese caught	New adults	New young	Number of retrapped birds	Number of birds newly colour-ringed
9/7/2014	HWP	41	23	18	0	17 (10 adults, 7 young)
9/7/2015	HWP	66	11	34	21	32 (13 adults, 19 young)
11/7/2016	Cromdale	20	5	13	2	18 (5 adults, 13 young)
12/7/2016	HWP	71	11	17	43	34 (24 adults, 10 young)
12/7/2017	HWP	65	15	3	47	35 (32 adults, 3 young)
13/7/2017	Cromdale	11	1	7	3	8 (1 adult, 7 young)
Total		274	66	92	116	144 (85 adults, 59 young)

Table 2. Sightings of naturalised Barnacle Geese caught in Strathspey. Some birds were seen at several sites.

	HWP	Cromdale	Total
Number colour-ringed	118	26	144
Never seen again	12 (10.2%)	7 (26.9%)	19 (13.2%)
Only seen at HWP	42 (35.6%)	0	42 (29.2%)
Only seen at Cromdale	2 (1.7%)	6 (23.1%)	8 (5.6%)
HWP	54 (45.8%)	8 (30.1%)	62 (43.1%)
Cromdale	6 (5.1%)	7 (26.9%)	13 (9.0%)
Solway Firth	52 (44.1%)	9 (34.6%)	61 (42.4%)
South Walney	8 (6.8%)	0	8 (5.6%)
West Norway	8 (6.8%)	4 (15.3%)	12 (8.3%)
Elsewhere	2 (1.7%)	1 (3.8%)	3 (2.1%)

Birds returning to the ringing sites

Forty-eight (33.3%) of the 144 birds fitted with plastic rings were only ever seen or caught again back at their original ringing site, 42 at HWP and six at Cromdale (Table 2) and their wintering area remains unknown. At the HWP, the average return of geese marked as adults, in the year after ringing, (68.9%) was higher than those marked as goslings (55.4%) although this was not statistically

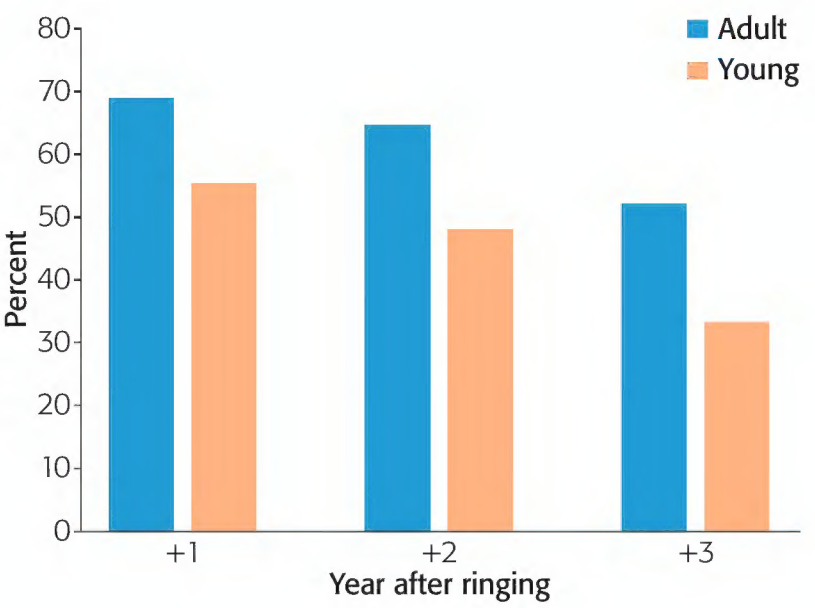

Figure 1. Re-encounter rates of naturalised Barnacle Geese ringed at the Highland Wildlife Park, Kincraig in 2014–16.

Table 3. Re-encounter rates of naturalised Barnacle Geese in Strathspey in 2014 to 2017.

	Year	Age	Number	Year +1	Year +2	Year +3
HWP	2014	Adult	23	16 (69.6)	16 (69.6)	12 (52.1)
	2015	Adult	11	7 (63.6)	6 (54.5)	
	2016	Adult	11	8 (72.3)	-	
	Combined		**45**	**31 (68.9)**	**22 (64.7)**	**12 (52.1)**
	2014	Young	18	5 (27.8)	7 (38.9)	6 (33.3)
	2015	Young	34	22 (64.8)	18 (52.9)	
	2016	Young	13	9 (52.9)	-	
	Combined		**65**	**36 (55.4)**	**25 (48.1)**	**6 (33.3)**
Cromdale	2016	Adult	5	3 (60.0)	-	
	2016	Young	13	2 (15.4)	-	

significant (X^2 = 0.439, ns, Table 3). Similarly, at Cromdale, 60% of adults and 15.4% of goslings were seen back at the site of ringing in the following year, although the sample sizes were small and only based on one year of sightings. The re-encounter rate of birds ringed at the HWP declined from 68.9% in the year after ringing to 52.1% in the third year after ringing, and for birds marked as goslings, the re-encounter rate also declined from 55.4% to 33.3% over the same period (Figure 1). Note that these represent minimum values since not all birds spending the summer at either site were seen, or retrapped during the moult. Seven Barnacle Geese switched moult sites within Scotland between years. Three birds that were originally ringed at the HWP were retrapped in subsequent years at Cromdale and four birds that were originally ringed at Cromdale were retrapped in subsequent years at the HWP, reflecting site interchange.

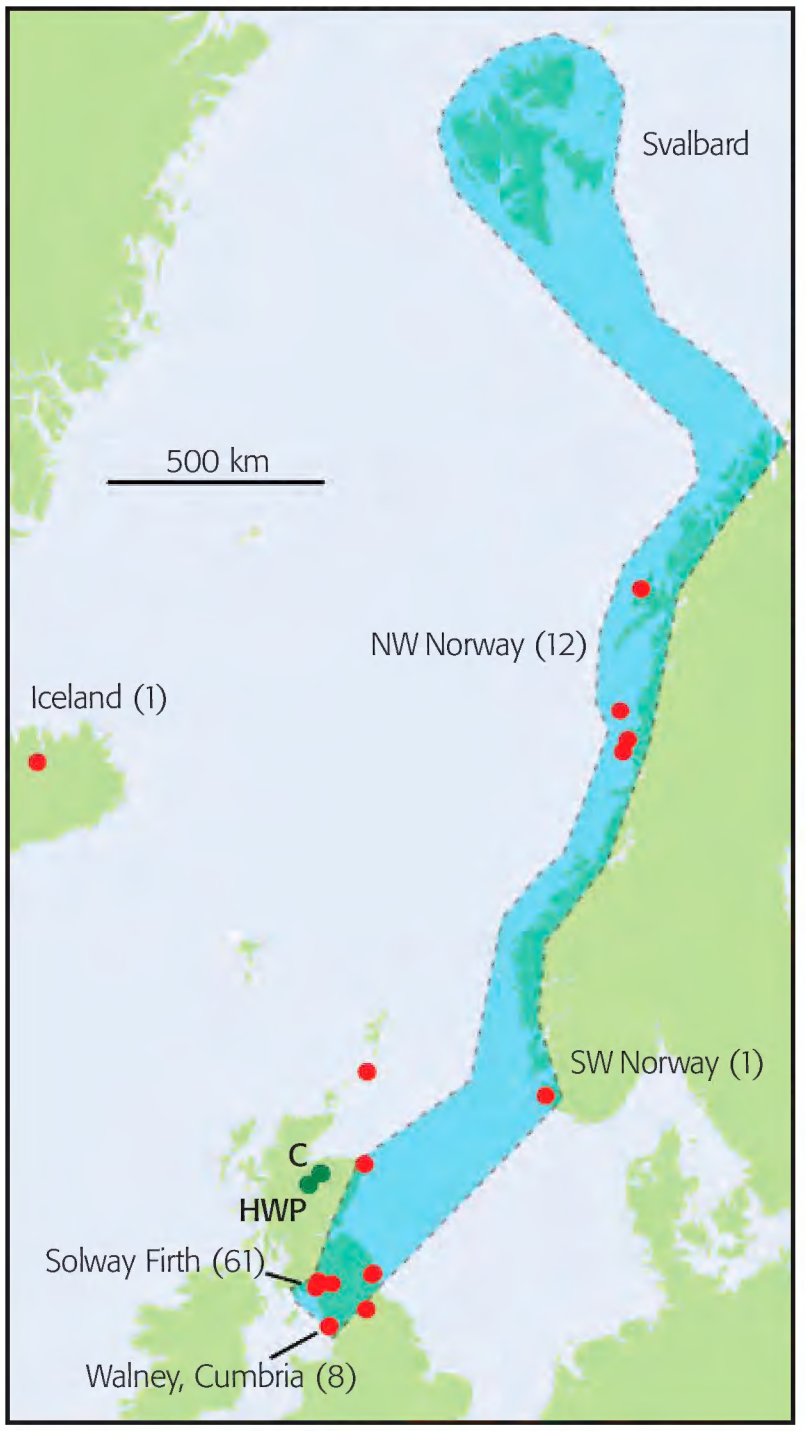

Figure 2. Sightings of 75 naturalised Barnacle Geese marked at the Highland Wildlife Park (HWP), Kincraig and Cromdale (C), Inverness-shire (green symbols) in July 2014–2017, during the non-breeding season (red symbols). Approximate range of Svalbard Barnacle Goose population also shown (shaded blue).

Sightings away from the Highland Wildlife Park and Cromdale

Seventy-five (52.1%) of the 144 colour-ringed birds were seen away from the two ringing sites: 61 geese were seen on the Solway Firth, eight were seen at South Walney, 12 were seen in north-west Norway on spring migration, one was shot dead in Iceland in September and three were seen in other parts of the UK (Table 2, Figure 2). Note that some birds were seen in several places. None of the 12 birds recorded in Norway were seen there in a subsequent year. Three birds were seen in north-west Norway (above 65°N) in spring before returning to moult at the HWP in July of the same year. Adult '4A' was seen at Vega in May 2015, adult '6T' was seen at Tenna, Herøy in May 2016 and adult '8J' was seen at Sør-Herøy in May 2017. All three were retrapped back at the HWP in the July of the same year. Each Barnacle Goose

would have flown *c.* 1,260 km during spring migration, only to have returned to Scotland soon afterwards to moult back at the HWP. Another marked bird '7C' was seen at Sør-Herøy on 12–15 May 2017 and seen on Fair Isle on 2–12 June, three weeks later. This bird may also have flown back to Scotland to moult.

Discussion

The ringing and use of plastic colour-rings has shown a range of movements of naturalised Barnacle Geese breeding and summering in Strathspey. The reason for the exodus of birds from Strathspey is unknown. Up to *c.* 1,000 Iceland Greylag Geese over-winter in Strathspey (Hearn & Mitchell 2004) feeding on permanent grassland, so it seems unlikely that the area is too cold in winter to support grazing geese, although periods when the ground is frozen are common. During the autumn, flocks of Greenland/Iceland Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus* are recorded flying over Strathspey heading south (CM pers. obs.). It is possible that the naturalised Barnacle Geese took the lead from these overflying flocks and headed south too.

The majority of birds seen away from their place of ringing were encountered on the Solway Firth, and South Walney in winter, or in north-west Norway in spring, all within the natural range of the Svalbard Barnacle Goose population. That some HWP/Cromdale birds have joined the migratory Svalbard population on spring migration is perhaps not surprising. Male migratory geese pair up with females during the winter and are known to return to the breeding quarters of the female (see also below); the females show high natal philopatry (Owen 1980). However, only six of the 12 birds seen in Norway were females, suggesting that birds of either sex that originated in Strathspey had an equal chance of joining the migratory Svalbard population.

Of particular interest are at least three birds that flew from their wintering grounds to north-west Norway in the spring with birds from the migratory Svalbard population, yet returned to Scotland to moult, a round journey of at least 2,500 km. Long-distance dispersal can have far-reaching consequences for the amount of gene flow between populations. It is not yet known if any of the HWP/Cromdale birds have permanently emigrated and joined the Svalbard population. For the presence of naturalised birds to have a genetic effect on the Svalbard population, the birds would need to breed with an existing member of the Svalbard population and for their offspring to remain and breed within the population (e.g. Madsen *et al.* 2013) and there is no evidence yet that this has occurred.

The dispersal of Barnacle Geese from Strathspey in early autumn may involve some other exploratory movements. Two birds were recorded on the Ythan Estuary (Aberdeenshire) in late September 2016, then in North Yorkshire in November that year. One bird was reported in July to September at Ashington (Northumberland) in the year after ringing. One bird was shot in Iceland in September 2016 having joined the east Greenland/Iceland breeding population. In addition, currently, nearly half of the colour-ringed birds were either never seen again (13.2%) or were only ever encountered in the summer back in Strathspey (34.7%); the wintering location of nearly a half of the Strathspey summering birds therefore remains unknown.

Natal dispersal of Barnacle Geese hatched in more temperate latitudes has been reported before. In The Netherlands (*c.* 51°N), 30% of surviving males and 24% of surviving females emigrated to a breeding colony in arctic Russia, although there were only two male birds for which breeding in Russia was proven. Van der Jeugd (2001) reported that *c.* 25% of all birds hatched in the oldest and largest Barnacle Goose colony in the Baltic on Gotland, Sweden, dispersed during a 10-year study, and that natal dispersal was much more frequent in males than females. Van der Jeugd & Litvin (2006) estimated that 6.6% of all juvenile Barnacle Geese from the same colony dispersed over long distances, most probably to the Russian Arctic.

There are several thousand colour-ringed Barnacle Geese in the Svalbard population, the birds having mostly been ringed on the breeding quarters. Despite this, there are no observations of Barnacle Geese hatched in the Svalbard population in Strathspey. Thus, dispersal from Strathspey is probably not balanced by immigration (which may limit the growth of the population there), and that the Strathspey Barnacle Goose population currently is a source, adding a very small number of individuals to the Svalbard population. Van der Jeugd & Litvin (2006) reached a similar conclusion due to the absence of Barnacle Geese ringed in arctic Russia subsequently breeding in The Netherlands.

The differences in return rates to Strathspey suggests that winter mortality might be higher for first year birds than for adults. Differences in age-specific survival is known from the migratory population of Svalbard Barnacle Geese with estimates of 89% and 63% annual survival rates for adult and first winter birds, respectively (Layton-Matthews *et al.* 2019). The recorded interchange both within and between seasons of the two breeding/moulting sites indicate that the sites are not functionally isolated. Since the Barnacle Geese breeding and moulting at Cromdale were only located in 2012 (BB pers. obs.), it is probable that the Cromdale site is an offshoot of the HWP site.

Future management of the Barnacle Geese in Strathspey

In terms of naturalised flocks and wildlife law, Barnacle Goose is currently listed on Schedule 9 of the 1981 Wildlife & Countryside Act which makes it illegal to release them into the wild. However, any releases prior to the 1981 Act are treated as wild birds i.e. they are fully protected. The release and establishment of the naturalised flock of Barnacle Geese at the HWP is well documented and there have been no deliberate releases of birds there in recent years. The population breeds freely and appears to be self-sustaining, and due to low productivity in some years and birds dispersing from the site, numbers have not escalated. The birds are well-liked by visitors. However, given that this study has demonstrated that some of this introduced-breeding flock is mixing with wild migratory populations, a management plan for the naturalised flock is needed and an assessment of that need should be made. Highland Wildlife Park is currently conducting a Biodiversity Action Planning Process due to be completed 2021, in which this species will be considered.

Further research

The catching and marking of the naturalised flock of Barnacle Geese at the HWP and Cromdale offers an opportunity for further study. We have shown that some of the geese winter within the winter range of the migratory Svalbard population and have joined it, and one joined the migratory Greenland population. However, only a half of the geese marked with plastic rings were seen away from the ringing/breeding sites, thus, the winter quarters of half of the flock remains unknown. Maintaining the capture and ringing of the two summering flocks will provide necessary information about emigration rates in order to support management options for the naturalised flock in the future. Rapid advances in the miniaturisation of Global Positioning System (GPS) tags have enabled the tracking of geese on a daily basis (e.g. Mitchell *et al.* 2016). The deployment of such devices on Barnacle Geese is in its infancy but such tags have recently become available to enable to year-round tracking of the HWP/Cromdale birds.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks go to all those that have helped during the catches, including staff at HWP. Thanks also go to observers who have taken the time to read and report colour-rings: Andy Rickeard, Audrey and Gwyn Williams, Brian Henderson, Brian Morrell, Catrin Eden, Chris Briggs, Harry Scott, Ciaran Hatsell, Colin Raven, Dan Gornall, Dave Pierce, David Jardine, Derek Farr, Dick Gillespy, Gavin Baptie, Gavin Chambers, Jeremy Squire, Jim Coyle, Johan Antonsen, John Cleaver, John Rutherford, Kate Sanderson, Katherine Bell, Keith Parkes, Kjell Isaksen, Larry Griffin, Martin Dagsland, Mike Youdale, Moray Souter, Northumbria Ringing Group, Orla & Larry Donnelly, Paul Shimmings, Richard Stephenson, Rosie Rutherford, Sarah Dalrymple, Scott Black, South Walney Bird Observatory, Steve Cooper, Steve Percival, Thomas Holm Carlsen, Tom Lowe,

Val & Bob Smith, Walney Bird Observatory and Zac Hinchcliffe. RZSS paid for the rings used in the study. Helen Senn, Thomas Doherty-Bone, Malcolm Ogilvie, Paul Shimmings and Larry Griffin kindly provided comments on an earlier draft.

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Revised ms accepted September 2020

Honey-buzzards breeding in west central Scotland during 2020

C.J. MCINERNY, K. HOEY & J. WILLIAMS

The Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* is a rare summer visitor and breeder in Scotland (McInerny 2014, McInerny & Shaw 2018, 2019). We have been monitoring the species in central Scotland for many years and studying it systematically since 2008 (Shaw *et al.* 2017, McInerny *et al.* 2018a, 2018b). This work has revealed the presence of Honey-buzzards throughout central Scotland where we have eight study areas. Two of these we named Study Area 1 (SA1) and Study Area 2 (SA2) are in east and west central Scotland, respectively, and have been monitored the longest with the most information about birds and territories. At both SA1 and SA2 juvenile birds have been observed since 2013 so breeding was inferred (McInerny *et al.* 2018a). Nevertheless, it was not until the 2018 season that a nest was first located at SA1 in east central Scotland. The pair reared two young that were photographed on the nest (McInerny *et al.* 2018b). During 2019, the same nest was visited at the start of the season for just a few days by the female Honey-buzzard, with no male appearing (McInerny & Shaw 2020). However, another nest at SA1 was discovered during 2019, with the pair producing two young (McInerny *et al.* 2020).

Up to and during this period, no nests were located at SA2 in west central Scotland, even though one pair, with the male named '*Malta*' and the female '*Sicily*', returned to the same territory for three seasons from 2017 to 2019, and juveniles were seen in 2013 and 2017 (McInerny *et al.* 2018b, KH & CJM pers. obs.). *Malta* and *Sicily* returned again in 2020, both first observed on 7 June, with *Malta* completing eight wing clapping display flights. The pair were likely to have been present from late May, but this was the first date SA2 could be monitored due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. Subsequent intensive fieldwork revealed behaviour by the pair that suggested the presence of an active nest containing young, with both the male and female flying into the same area of trees carrying food items. On 17 August, KH discovered the location of the nest, revealed by two well-grown juvenile birds sitting on branches. The juveniles were still 'branching' near the nest on 19 August, although flying short distances between and above the trees (Plates 3–4), possibly in response to *Sicily* who wing clapped 13 times while flying directly above them. This is the first documented Honey-buzzard nest recorded in west central Scotland.

Plates 3–4. Juvenile Honey-buzzard 'branching' near the nest, SA2 west central Scotland, 19 August 2020. This is the younger of the two produced by *Malta* and *Sicily*. © *Keith Hoey*

On 22 August, the older of the two juveniles was seen flying strongly above the canopy (Plate 5), with the parents still attending the other, younger juvenile at the nest. The next day *Malta*, *Sicily* and the older juvenile were observed perching in the crowns of trees over 1 km from the nest. On 24 August, *Sicily* and the older juvenile were seen flying together high in the sky, while *Malta* continued to attend the nest, bringing food to the younger juvenile, and wing clapped at least four times. This was the last date that Honey-buzzards were seen at SA2, as subsequent visits revealed no activity at the nest site. These observations indicate that juveniles can leave their territory relatively quickly after 'branching', although the process can take longer; it also appears that nesting during 2020 was earlier than other years, as we have observed juveniles present up to 11 September (Shaw *et al.* 2017, McInerny *et al.* 2018a). Following their departure, we expected that the SA2 birds would not be seen again in Scotland during 2020.

Plate 5. Juvenile Honey-buzzard, SA2 west central Scotland, 22 August 2020. This is the older of the two produced by *Malta* and *Sicily*. It is striking that it has already lost a tail feather after just a few weeks; this likely occurred during 'branching' on coniferous trees near the nest. © *Keith Hoey*

However, the story then took an unexpected and extraordinary turn. On 30 August, JW visited Glenmore, Isle of Bute (Clyde Islands) a known location at the north end of the island for watching raptors of various species. Just after midday, having already seen several Buzzards *Buteo buteo*, a ring-tail Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* and a Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, he was approaching an area of forestry and noticed another raptor fly out above the trees. From distance it looked like a juvenile Buzzard, but as it circled it appeared different, having harrier-like barring on the underwing, and a different bill. Two record photographs were captured before the bird disappeared (Plates 6–7). These images showed that it was instead a juvenile Honey-buzzard, the first time the species has been recorded on Bute (Forrester *et al.* 2012). Furthermore, when the images were shown on the Clyde SOC Grapevine, KH recognised the bird through plumage detail as the same older juvenile from the nest at SA2 (Plate 5). Honey-buzzards show much plumage variation and individuals can be distinguished using high quality photographic images (Shaw *et al.* 2019). So, remarkably, we have a 'photo recovery' and proof that an SA2

Plates 6–7. Juvenile Honey-buzzard, Glenmore, Isle of Bute, Clyde Islands, 30 August 2020. This is the same individual shown in Plate 5, revealed by identical feather and plumage detail. © *John Williams*

juvenile Honey-buzzard had initiated its migration, apparently in a south-westerly direction through Scotland. It would be fascinating to know the subsequent movements of this bird; perhaps it will be photographed elsewhere in the UK, Europe or even Africa? We hope that it makes a successful journey to sub-Saharan Africa, and that we see it again at SA2 in the future.

The work at SA2 was part of a national survey for Honey-buzzards in Scotland and the UK during 2020 and 2021 organised by Ken Shaw, Carol Miller, CJM, Steve Roberts and Rob Clements, under the auspices of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (www.rbbp.org.uk). We particularly thank Ken Shaw for his encouragement and support, and for comments on the text of this paper. The monitoring of Honey-buzzards at SA2 was completed with a Schedule 1 licence issued to CJM and KH by Nature Scot. To support the 2020 survey work CJM received a grant from the Glasgow Natural History Society, Professor Blodwen Lloyd Binns Bequest.

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Revised ms accepted September 2020

Pursuit diving by Long-tailed Ducks in Orkney during spring

D. PATTERSON

Outside the breeding period, Long-tailed Ducks *Clangula hyemalis* forage predominantly on sedentary prey, such as bivalve molluscs. These food items can be highly accessible and abundant in the seabed benthos but are relatively unprofitable because the ingestion of inert shell material bears an energetic and digestive cost. At certain stages of their annual cycle, Long-tailed Ducks also eat more crustaceans and fish, but such active prey costs more in energy because their mobility requires pursuit capture (see Cramp & Simmons 1977). For example, in the southern Baltic, fish (and fish eggs) increased as a percentage of the Long-tailed Duck diet during the spring, peaking in April (Stempniewicz 1995). Seasonal changes in diet, including taking fish eggs in late winter/spring, have also been recorded in North America (Woodward & Humphreys 2018). Andrews (2018) and Cosgrove (1997 & 2018) have published accounts of the species eating fish in Scotland. However, the diet of Scottish Long-tailed Ducks has not been well studied and *The Birds of Scotland* has identified that we would benefit from knowing more (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Personal observations of Long-tailed Duck flocks wintering in Scottish inshore waters from 2015 to 2020 suggested that a very high proportion of the flocks were regularly diving over the same area of seabed. This involved birds that were either part of a very slow-moving or static flock. While this 'normal' behaviour is taken to be indicative of birds feeding on static benthic prey (e.g. bottom-dwelling molluscs), this note reports observations of the species showing radically different foraging behaviour, which is interpreted as being consistent with pursuit of active prey.

Pursuit flock dives

On 28 April 2018, while undertaking time budget studies of Long-tailed Ducks (see Patterson *et al.* 2019), Carl Mitchell and I located a flock of 870 birds within Echnaloch Bay (Burray, Orkney - ND4797). It was apparent that the birds were a fast-moving foraging flock, which strongly suggested that birds were diving in pursuit of highly mobile prey rather than feeding in the more typical, relatively static duck raft. It was fascinating to see how this species had adopted such a different strategy with the whole flock in pursuit of presumably either a shoal of small fish or fast-moving crustaceans.

This 'pursuit flock dive' behaviour was also observed nearby within Hunda Sound (ND4496) a day later, albeit involving a much smaller flock (49 birds), thus making it less dramatic than at Echnaloch Bay. Nevertheless, both of these bays have similar physical attributes, in that they form relatively shallow narrow inlets. Therefore, as ducks pursue their prey towards land it is likely they push their mobile

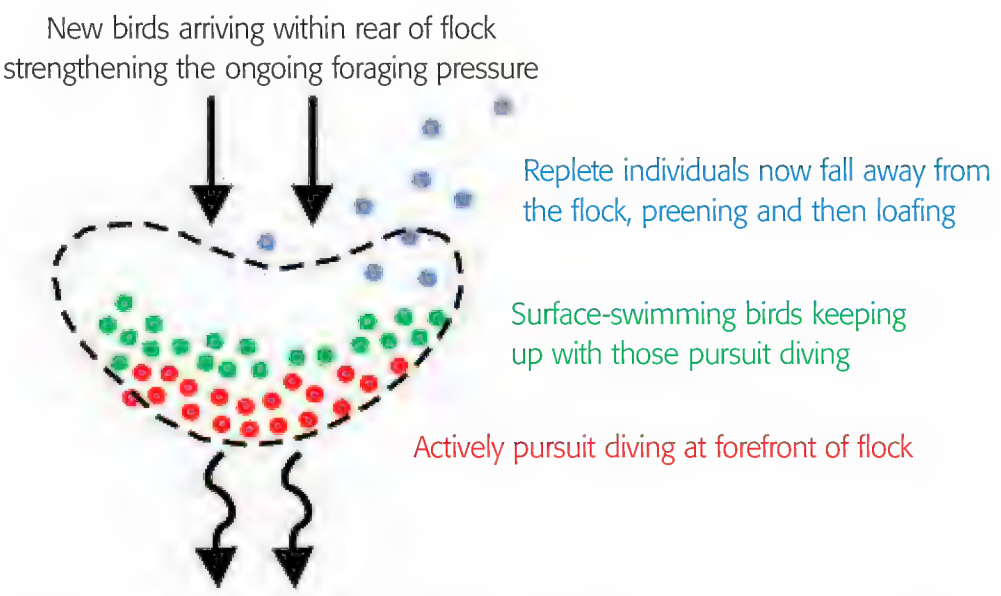
New birds arriving within rear of flock strengthening the ongoing foraging pressure
Replete individuals now fall away from the flock, preening and then loafing
Surface-swimming birds keeping up with those pursuit diving
Actively pursuit diving at forefront of flock

Figure 1. The dynamics of pursuit flock dive behaviour witnessed at Echnaloch Bay, Burray, Orkney.

prey into even shallower water, eventually forcing it to double-back to where ducks can continue chasing the shoal. A diagrammatic representation of this behaviour is shown in Figure 1. It is possible that other similar bays and inlets within Scapa Flow may also lend themselves to such 'pursuit flock dive' behaviour by Long-tailed Ducks.

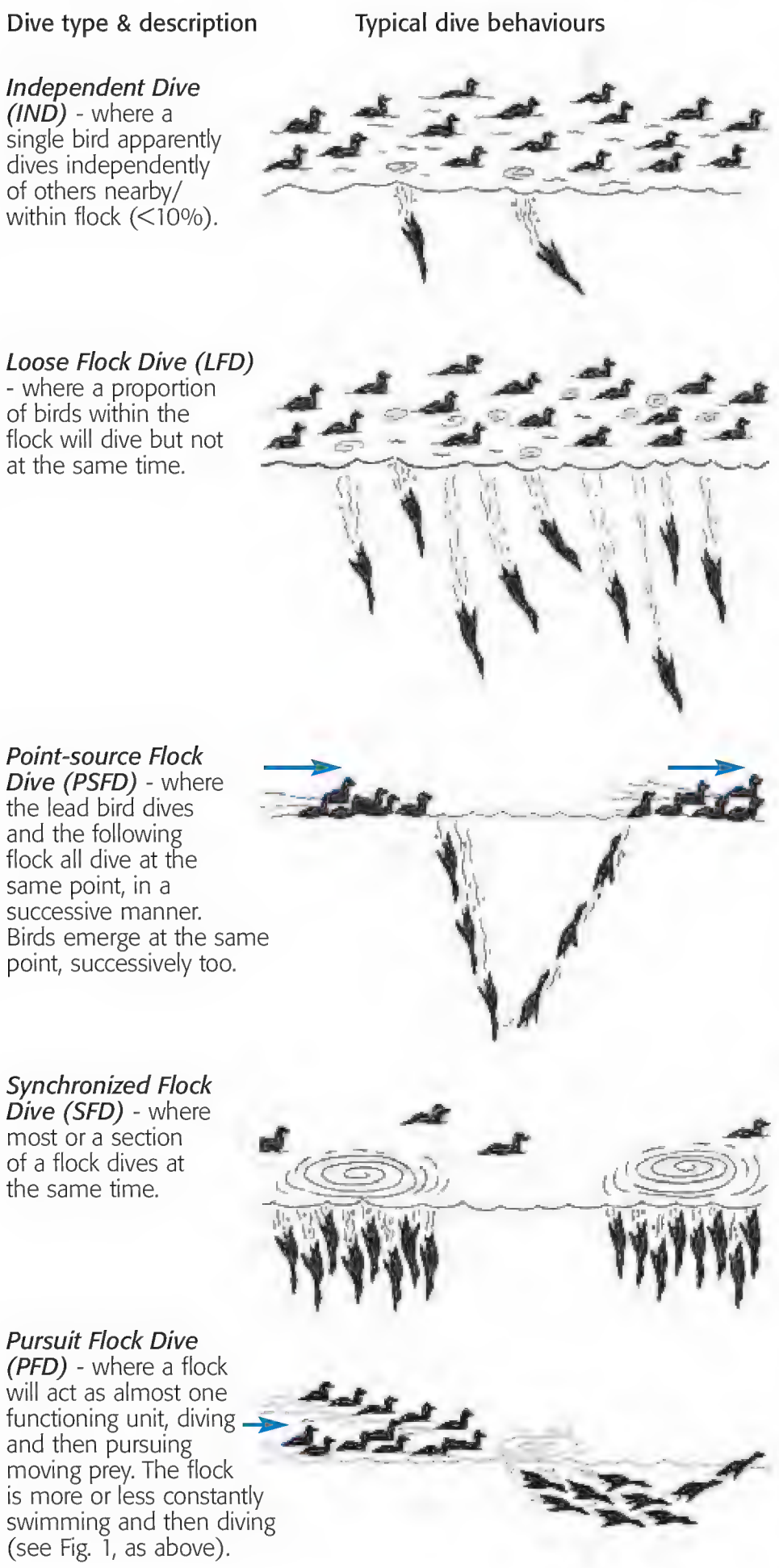
Dive type & description
Typical dive behaviours
Independent Dive (IND) - where a single bird apparently dives independently of others nearby/ within flock (<10%).
Loose Flock Dive (LFD) - where a proportion of birds within the flock will dive but not at the same time.
Point-source Flock Dive (PSFD) - where the lead bird dives and the following flock all dive at the same point, in a successive manner. Birds emerge at the same point, successively too.
Synchronized Flock Dive (SFD) - where most or a section of a flock dives at the same time.
Pursuit Flock Dive (PFD) - where a flock will act as almost one functioning unit, diving and then pursuing moving prey. The flock is more or less constantly swimming and then diving (see Fig. 1, as above).

Figure 2. Marine water bird 'dive types'.

It is unknown if 'pursuit flock dive' behaviour is a key part of Long-tailed Duck's spring foraging strategy (subject to the presence of available prey). However, it may also feature at other times of the year where the contours of the shore lend themselves to this strategy, and shoals of small fish are available. If the finite and sedentary mollusc resource has been largely depleted during the course of the winter, then either fish and/or crustaceans could feature as an addition to their spring diet.

In Orkney, there is now considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that peak numbers of Long-tailed Ducks occur during the spring, with passage birds possibly staging there (Forrester *et al.* 2007, Upton *et al.* 2018). Therefore, it is possible that 'pursuit-diving' may be a spring strategy, and Orkney seems well-placed to support this foraging behaviour. Systad *et al.* (2000) note that mobile prey is probably more energy-consuming to catch. However, Stafford *et al.* (2014) highlighted that birds are expected to choose habitats where energy sources are readily available during migration and avoid energetically expensive staging areas. The same authors acknowledge it is important that habitat requirements for waterfowl at their spring migratory sites should be better understood.

Dive types explored

I suggest the concept of 'dive types' could be explored as a way to classify foraging behaviours of our marine waterfowl (Figure 2). Studying and recording 'dive types' could help to standardise observations between researchers. It could be useful in helping to identify foraging trends

and also to understand how variables, such as habitat, seasonality, food resources, flock sizes, age/sex composition, tides, etc. affect these behaviours. Collecting data on dive types has the potential to help us understand habitat requirements and the foraging ecology of marine water birds at a local level. This detailed level of understanding could eventually lead to targeted conservation efforts, providing wide-scale benefit.

Acknowledgements

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) and Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) kindly supported the original project to assess freshwater use by Long-tailed Ducks. Many individuals supported this initial project and were fully acknowledged in the previous publication (Patterson *et al.* 2019). This short paper would not have been possible without support from Carl Mitchell and Alan J. Leitch. Carl Mitchell, Kate Thompson, Tony Fox and Lyn Wells constructively commented on previous drafts. Lyn kindly provided the illustrations. This note is dedicated to the memory of Kevin Woodbridge (North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory). In my youth, he provided me with a valued environment at NRBO where I could develop a deeper understanding of ornithology, people and friendships.

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Revised ms accepted September 2020

Exceptional numbers of Storm Petrels in the Firth of Clyde off Corsewall Point, Dumfries and Galloway during August 2020

B.D. HENDERSON

This note adds to my previous petrel paper in *Scottish Birds* (Henderson 2020). For the period 1970 to 2019 the Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* has been recorded on 200 occasions from land-based seawatches at Corsewall Point, a promontory at the northern tip of the North Rhins in Dumfries and Galloway, of which 34% were recorded during August (B. Henderson unpublished notes).

During August 2020, a minimum of 320 Storm Petrels were recorded on 26 out of 28 days during 197 hours of seawatching at Corsewall Point. Daily fluctuations in numbers were evident throughout the month (Figure 1). The mean number recorded per day was 20 (range 1 to 40). Nine counts exceeded 20 birds with high counts of 40 on 27 August, 35 on 8 August, 30 on 6 August and 28 on 26 August (pers. obs.). Time-logged observations showed that 46% of all Storm Petrels were recorded during three time periods 11:00–11:59 hrs (17%), 06:00–06:59 hrs (16%) and 08:00–08:59 hrs (14%). Observations showed that 35% of all Storm Petrel sightings involved singletons, or occasionally two birds, moving south-west or north-east between feeding areas; 29% were birds actively feeding offshore, 15% were in proximity to large commercial trawlers, 11% were at offshore feeding frenzies and 10% were around or behind the Annalong (Co. Down) based lobster boat *Nicola Joanne*. Up to 15 Storm Petrels were noted around and behind the lobster boat as it hauled in, re-baited and reset its lines of creels. Larger commercial fishing trawlers fishing in the Firth of Clyde attracted numerous Storm Petrels as they trawled and hauled up their nets and processed their catches with up to 21 individuals noted on occasion.

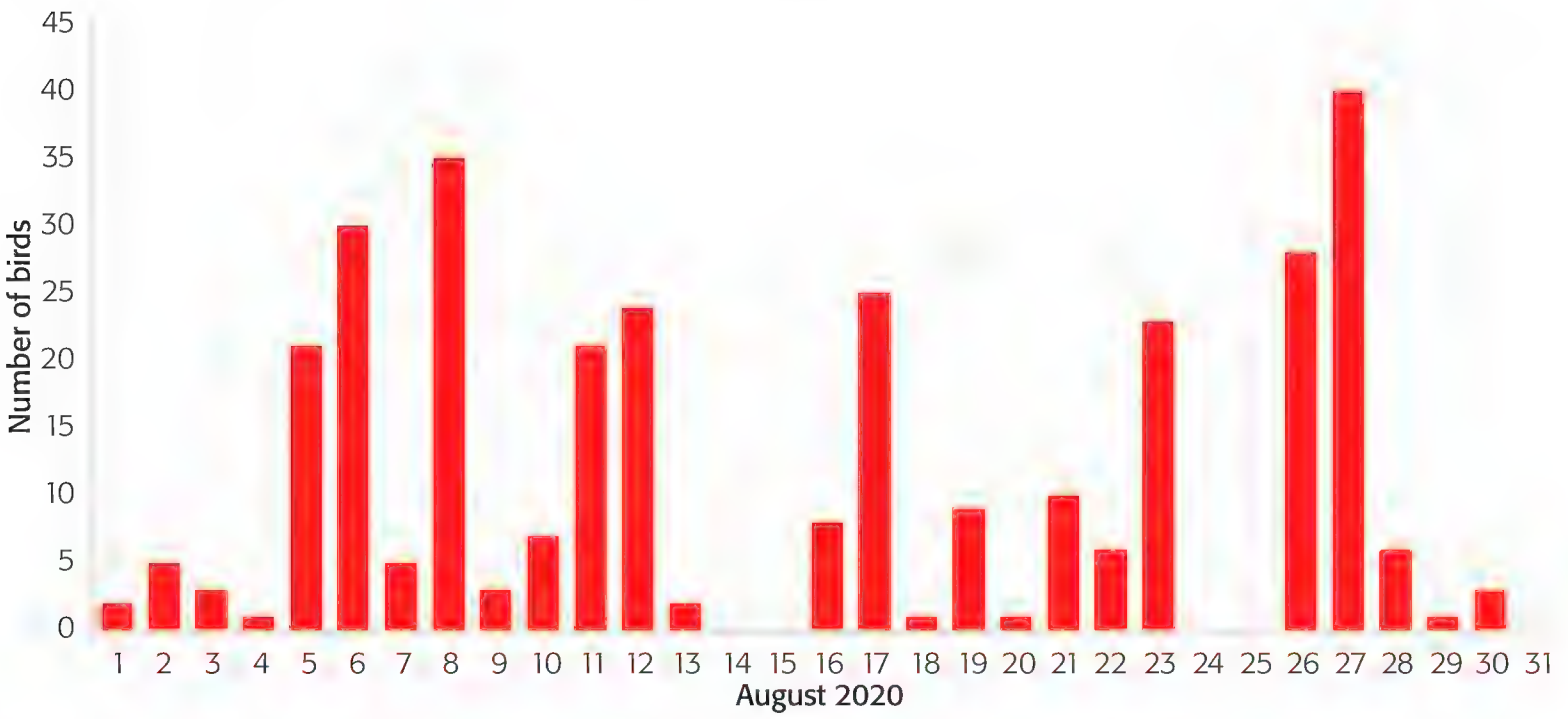

Figure 1. Daily abundances of Storm Petrels recorded off Corsewall Point during August 2020.

Plate 8. Corsewall Point looking towards the North Channel, 21 August 2020. © *Brian D. Henderson*

Plate 9. Storm Petrel and Guillemot off Corsewall Point, 5 August 2020. © *Brian D. Henderson*

The high peaks in abundance were correlated with the presence of the lobster boat and the fishing trawlers. Once the vessels had finished hauling their gear, the majority of Storm Petrels quickly dispersed with only a few lingering on, feeding and foraging in the vessels' wakes. The lobster boat *Nicola Joanne* fishes further out in the Firth of Clyde and is much larger than the smaller lobster boats that fish closer to the coast. At times the trawlers were too distant to pick out any Storm Petrels around them and it was only possible to observe them when the trawlers fished along the south-eastern edge of the Clyde Sea Sill MPA (Marine Protection Area) closer to the headland. On clear, calm and overcast days with little wind, it was moderately easy to pick out the Storm Petrels at distance. Benign conditions allowed for groups of Storm Petrels to be observed distantly at offshore feeding frenzies where Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus*, Gannets *Morus bassanus*, Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*, *Larus* gull species and occasionally Northern Minke Whales *Baleanoptera acutorostrata* were present. During mid- to late afternoons in bright sunny conditions it was much more difficult to pick out any Storm Petrels, especially at distance, and this is reflected in the time-logged statistics. A total of 47 individuals were noted on 1 September and constituted the last large count recorded off Corsewall Point during 2020. The exceptional number of Storm Petrels recorded during August 2020 accounted for 64% of all Storm Petrel sightings here during 2020 and can at least partly be attributed to the regular presence of the lobster boat and the commercial fishing vessels closer to the headland.

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Revised ms accepted September 2020

Detecting forest raptors in Scotland using vantage point methodology

K.D. SHAW, C.J. MCINERNY, A.W. LAUDER, K. GIBB, A. WHEWELL, A. LITTLE, K. LITTLE, K. HOEY, J.S. NADIN & B. KERR

This paper summarises and analyses observations of three species of forest-dwelling raptors, Goshawk Accipiter gentilis, *Honey-buzzard* Pernis apivorus *and Hobby* Falco subbuteo, *in central Scotland during 2017 and 2018. The analysis reveals periods during the breeding season when each species is most visible, which aids their detection by visual observations from vantage points. Such information could inform and assist survey work for these species elsewhere in Scotland and the UK.*

Introduction

A major challenge for the conservation of raptor species in Scotland is the accurate assessment of their numbers and distribution through survey work. However, survey work in forested areas can be difficult due of the nature of the landscape, and because some of the raptor species typical of this habitat are secretive and unobtrusive for much of the year, making them challenging to locate. This, along with the observation that many Scottish raptor group members work on open-ground birds of prey, means that such forest species are likely to be under-recorded across Scotland. Scotland has reduced forest cover compared to other countries in North-west Europe. By 1900, only about 4.5% of Scotland's land area was wooded (Smout 2003, Forrester *et al.* 2007). However, large-scale afforestation increased this figure to about 17% by the early 21st century, and the Scottish Government has a target of 21% forest cover by 2032 (SNH 2020). This expansion in forest coverage in Scotland since the second half of the 20th century has resulted in improved opportunities for forest nesting raptors.

The Goshawk, a resident breeder found predominantly in heavily forested areas, is increasing in numbers and range both in Scotland and the UK (Plates 10–11). It probably ceased nesting in the 1880s, and only re-colonised, from escaped and released falconers' birds, during the mid-1900s (Holloway 1996, Marquiss & Newton 1982). The most recent estimate of the UK breeding population is 620 pairs (Holling *et al.* 2018), although this figure is considered an underestimate by many familiar with the species. Goshawks are now widely distributed in the Borders, Dumfries & Galloway and North-East Scotland, and it is likely that they colonised central Scotland from these areas, probably during the 1970s (Marquiss *et al.* 2003, Forrester *et al.* 2007).

The Honey-buzzard is a rare summer breeding visitor to Scotland from Africa, with birds found at forest and wooded locations throughout the country, and spread thinly across central Scotland (McInerny & Shaw 2019, Plates 10–11). However, in a number of new areas where dedicated workers have searched for the species throughout the UK, birds have been located (Roberts & Law 2014), so it is likely that others remain undetected in many parts of Scotland.

The Hobby is a rare summer breeding visitor to Scotland from Africa (Etheridge 2005, Etheridge *et al.* 2006, Plates 10–11). At the beginning of the 21st century it was known to nest in just a few Scottish counties as far north as Highland (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Since then birds have been seen increasingly on territory, although breeding is rarely confirmed. Unlike Goshawk and Honey-buzzard, the Hobby is not restricted to forests, as it can nest on the forest edge, isolated stands of

Plate 10. Photomontage of raptor species seen at Study Area 1 (SA1) in central Scotland during 2017 and 2018. The 'activity windows' of three (blue circle, top: Goshawk, bottom left: Honey-buzzard, and bottom right: Hobby) that allow their detection by vantage point methodology are described in this paper. The other species shown are, from left to right, Kestrel, White-tailed Eagle, Red Kite, Osprey, Buzzard, Peregrine, Golden Eagle and Sparrowhawk. © *Kris Gibb & John Anderson*.

trees and even in single trees. However, as it nests in forests in the central Scotland study area described in this paper, and appears mostly to be associated with forest nesting habitat in Scotland, we treat it as such here.

These three species, which can nest in the same forests, have striking differences in their behaviour throughout the year. However, in the context of this work, the most important similarity is that they are all difficult to detect on their breeding grounds being unobtrusive and challenging to locate, and usually present at low densities. This leads to a near cultural acceptance amongst non-specialist observers in Scotland that they are unlikely to see them. Indeed, the Goshawk is held somewhat in awe by Scottish birdwatchers (notwithstanding it is well studied by several skilled raptor workers), the Honey-buzzard is thought 'too exotic' to be local, and the Hobby is still sometimes considered a 'Southern species' despite a long-term, albeit small, population in the country. However, if we understand each species' behaviour this increases the chance of observing them to allow the establishment of their true status throughout Scotland. Being aware of the optimum time of year for observations, i.e. their 'activity window', is key to this process. Furthermore, locating birds in breeding areas using such observational methods prevents risk of nest disturbance, leaving detailed nest studies and ringing to proficient and licensed raptor workers.

In this paper we describe detecting these three forest breeding raptors in central Scotland through systematic monitoring. We identify the peak of spring and summer activity when each species becomes most visible. We hope that this information will be helpful for surveyors who wish to locate the three species elsewhere in Scotland and the UK.

Plate 11. a) Goshawk, **b)** Honey-buzzard and **c)** Hobby. © *Dennis Morrison and John Anderson.*

Study area and methods

The study area (SA1) in east central Scotland is described in detail in Shaw *et al.* (2017) and McInerny *et al.* (2018a). It is approximately 170 km^2 in size, with a mean altitude of 282 m. The area is a mixture of largely managed, wooded and open zones, with the majority of the woodland mature. There are large stands of both coniferous and mature broadleaf trees in an upland setting, along with agricultural and recreational areas, wetlands and rivers. Almost 75% of the area is wooded, much of it with large, commercial, conifer blocks in an upland situation. However, there are also discrete mature broadleaf woods, and mixed woodland both containing Beech *Fagus sylvatica* and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, and small areas of 'open' Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*. There are also tracts of large conifers including Norway *P. abies* and Sitka Spruce *Picea sitchensis*, Larch *Larix* spp., and Scots Pine, and other large non-native species such as Douglas Fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, which have grown to maturity in open woodlands.

At least nine Honey-buzzard territories and at least five non-breeders were detected in SA1 during the study period of 2017 and 2018 (McInerny *et al.* 2018a), as well as six pairs of Goshawks and at least six pairs of Hobby (Plate 10). Other raptors recorded during 2017 and 2018 were Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Sparrowhawk *A. nisus*, Kestrel *F. tinnunculus* (several breeding pairs), Peregrine *F. peregrinus* (one pair), Merlin *F. columbarius*, Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, Red Kite *Milvus milvus* (breeding adjacent to the study area), White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* and Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* (McInerny *et al.* 2018a, McInerny *et al.* 2018b). This range and number of raptors species is possibly unequalled anywhere else in Scotland and the UK.

The study methods used to monitor raptors are described in McInerny *et al.* (2018a, 2018b). They are based on regular and coordinated observations from early May to mid-September by up to 21 surveyors from 16 vantage points (VPs). Most VP observations lasted 2–6 hours, although some were up to 10 hours. Observations in early May were *ad hoc*, in the knowledge that occurrence of Honey-buzzard and Hobby was likely to be low at that time. From late May and June VPs were visited on 2–3 days per week, while from July to early September they were visited, on average, most days (Shaw *et al.* 2017, McInerny *et al.* 2018a). On each visit the number and age of raptor species were recorded, as well as location, direction, and time and duration of flight. Individual sightings were recorded. Each sighting consisted of an observation of one or more individuals in a discrete period of flight, recording number, age, sex along with time, duration and direction of flight, and notes on behaviour. No more than three VPs were used simultaneously. When more than one VP was used they were usually at least 3 km apart. Every flight line was counted for each individual bird of each species (even if the same individual had a previously counted flight line). However, only on five occasions in the two seasons were flight lines seen from two VPs simultaneously; on these occasions the longest flight line in terms of time was recorded. Effort was calculated in observer hours and was 712 hours in 2017 and 1,261 hours in 2018.

The resulting data for each species were analysed and plotted graphically (Figures 1–3). The sightings rate (mean number of sightings per hour) was plotted across each ten-day period, from May to September. This showed the average rate of sightings per hour across each ten-day period, alongside the number of hours of effort for each ten-day period.

Results

Goshawk

Figure 1 illustrates the occurrence pattern for Goshawk at SA1, central Scotland, showing a peak ten-day mean sightings rate of 0.32 sightings per hour in early September. An 'activity window' for observing Goshawks was noted in this study during July, August, and September. During this period, juveniles, especially females, flew above trees and were aggressive, harassing other birds of prey, including Ospreys and Honey-buzzards; such aggression has been recorded elsewhere (Gamauf *et al.* 2013).

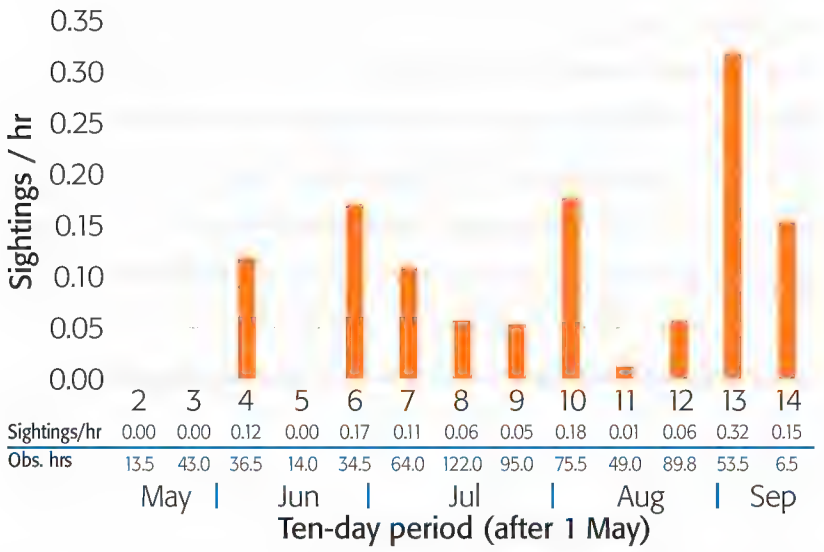

Figure 1. Analysis of Goshawk observations at Study Area 1 (SA1) in central Scotland, May to September 2017–2018. Sightings per hour across ten-day periods, alongside the number of hours of observation for each ten-day period, are plotted. Note that period 14 is based on a single 6.5-hour watch.

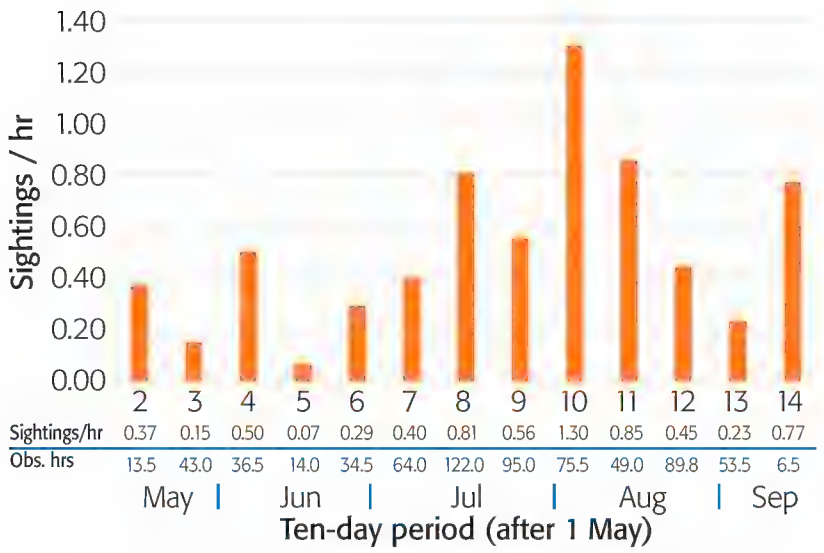

Figure 2. Analysis of Honey-buzzard observations at Study Area 1 (SA1) in central Scotland, May to September 2017–2018. Sightings per hour across ten-day periods, alongside the number of hours of observation for each ten-day period, are plotted. Note that period 14 is based on a single 6.5-hour watch.

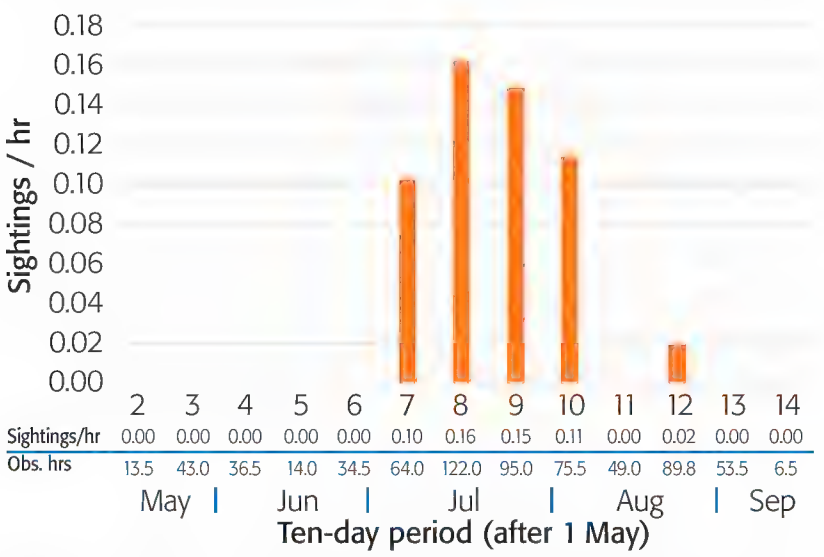

Figure 3. Analysis of Hobby observations at Study Area 1 (SA1) in central Scotland, May to September 2017–2018. Sightings per hour across ten-day periods, alongside the number of hours of observation for each ten-day period, are plotted. Note that period 14 is based on a single 6.5-hour watch.

Honey-buzzard

Figure 2 illustrates the occurrence pattern for Honey-buzzard at SA1, central Scotland, showing a distinct period of more intense activity in late July to mid-August but with short peaks both in spring and again in September. The ten-day mean sightings rate peaked at 1.3 sightings per hour in early August.

Hobby

Figure 3 illustrates the occurrence pattern for Hobby at SA1, central Scotland. This shows an absence of sightings in May and June and a peak in sightings in July and August. The ten-day mean sightings rate though was lower than the other two species and peaked at just 0.16 sightings per hour in mid-July.

Discussion

Goshawk

The optimum period to detect Goshawks is when they display during late winter and early spring (Hardey *el al.* 2013). At this time birds fly above territorial woods and perform obvious looping, stalling and 'butterfly' display flights, which allow them to be seen at distance. We have observed birds displaying elsewhere in Scotland during February, but with March the peak month (KDS, JSN, Jim Steele, pers. obs.). However, males sometimes continued to display, usually more briefly, in April, occasionally in May, and rarely in June. The male will often display momentarily over the nesting area later in the season before he leaves to hunt (KDS, Stuart Benn, pers. obs.). Thus, we recommend that surveyors wishing to locate Goshawks should search for them early in the year from late February to early April but particularly during March when they display. We suggest surveying around the 20 March on a day suitable for flying raptors, dry with wind up to force 5, especially across slopes with a southerly aspect. Males can display after this through April and May, albeit less frequently and more briefly.

Goshawk interactions with other raptor species are usually rarely seen, but there is a period between July and September when the aggressive juveniles, particularly females, are more obvious when they fly and harass other birds of prey. During this period Goshawks

were observed at SA1 up to twice a day (Figure 1). Although Goshawks do not often undertake prolonged soaring, when this occurs it is mostly from late morning to late afternoon. It should be noted, however, that adults have been observed bringing prey to the nest late in the evening, even when it is almost dark (KDS pers. obs.).

Honey-buzzard

Honey-buzzards have been studied by several groups around the UK (Appleby 2012, Roberts & Law 2014, Harwood & Richman 2016). Many surveyors initiate looking for birds on their arrival on breeding areas in mid- to late May, when they are visible performing their wing-clapping display flights over territorial woods. However, it is now realised that July and August are the optimum months to locate Honey-buzzards in new areas, when breeders and non-breeders can both perform the display flights more persistently (Figure 2, McInerny & Shaw 2018, Shaw *et al.* 2019). Juveniles should be searched for from mid-August to mid-September. Honey-buzzards can arrive on their breeding grounds in Scotland earlier than was once thought, from around the second week in May, with females incubating by the end of the month (McInerny *et al.* 2018a, 2020, McInerny & Shaw 2020).

When territorial densities are high in core areas, especially including non-breeders, surveyors watching from suitable VPs can expect to see Honey-buzzards, on average, every 1 h 15 min (Figure 2). Sightings rates can reach as high as 4.5 sightings per hour and can involving up to 10 individuals, while the peak ten-day average reaches 1.2 sightings per hour in August. However, when a lone pair of Honey-buzzards is present they behave differently. In another of our study areas, SA4, where just one pair (possibly two) of Honey-buzzard and importantly no non-breeders are present, along with two pairs of Goshawks, the Honey-buzzards were seen as little as once every three days in July and August (KDS, CJM, pers. obs.). A similar reduction in observations was observed within study areas, between core and peripheral sites.

Our recommendation in low-density areas and/or where VPs are not ideally placed is that surveyors should be prepared to watch for 6-hour periods over three consecutive suitable days for flying raptors (dry and light winds) in July and August before concluding that birds are likely absent. In contrast, in high-density areas, surveyors can expect peaks of more than ten sightings in a 6-hour survey period (Figure 2). Honey-buzzards should be searched for when they display both after arrival in Scotland, from mid-May to early June, and subsequently during the months of July and August before they depart. Looking for birds after mid-September in breeding areas is unnecessary, as adults and young have started their migrations to Africa, with the former leaving by late August and the latter by mid-September. Although Honey-buzzards can be seen at any time of the day, they are usually not observed flying above wooded areas until mid-morning (KDS, CJM, pers. obs.). Most workers therefore look from mid-morning to mid-afternoon, with a standard 6-hour VP watch from 10:00–16:00 hrs.

Hobby

Of the three species Hobby is the least abundant in our study areas. Other authors have provided evidence from their long-term studies of the time of year to detect the species in the UK. In England, birds arrive on breeding territories from early May and depart during August (Chapman 1999, Clements 2001, Sergio & Bogliani 2001, Hardey *et al.* 2013).

Of the three forest raptors, the Hobby showed the shortest 'activity window' at SA1 (Figure 3). Our work in central Scotland indicates that the optimum period to observe it is late July to early August. The latest sighting of Hobby at SA1 was 21 August; the species appears to leave the area well before Honey-buzzards depart. The Hobby, although often calling in both the morning and evening, is usually most active in the late afternoon and evening (Chapman 1999, Hardey *et al.* 2013). Young Hobbies tend to be inactive during the day, but we have noticed adults and second-calendar-year birds, sometimes three together, near nests throughout the afternoon.

The impact of climate change on Hobby and Honey-buzzard as migrants is likely to be of growing importance. Their presence in Scotland may become more significant if climate change continues to follow recent trends (Balmer *et al.* 2013). Distribution of the Hobby, at least, has seen a significant recent expansion north and westwards in the UK, probably as a result of climate change (Fuller *et al.* 2013).

In summary, if searching for Goshawk, Honey-buzzard and Hobby in the same forested area, July and August, and perhaps particularly early August, is the recommended period to give the highest probability of seeing all three, with most activity from late morning through to late afternoon.

Acknowledgements

We thank for contribution to the survey work: Davie Abrahams, John Anderson, Harry Bell, Stuart Benn, Duncan Cameron, Andy Carroll, Kevin Duffy, Kathy Evans, Ian Francis, Rick Goater, Angus Hogg, Mark Holling, Clive McKay, Bob McMillan, Sandy McNeil, Carol Miller, Rod Miller, Brian Minshull, Dennis Morrison, Duncan Orr-Ewing, Scott Paterson, Tommy Ross, Robin Scott, Claire Smith, Trevor Smith, Graham Sparshott, Peter Stronach, Andy Williams, Donald Wilson and Ron Youngman. We learned many things from Rob Clements, Roy Dennis, Brian Etheridge, Roy Frost, John Harwood, Mick Marquiss, Steve Roberts, Pete Richman and particularly Chris Rollie. KDS acknowledges Jim Steele for 40 years of watching forest raptors together. Mark Cavanagh and Wendy Mattingly were there at the start. We thank all the excellent forestry people we have worked with, particularly Gareth Mason (Forest and Land Scotland). We thank John Anderson, Kris Gibb and Dennis Morrison for photographic images used in Plate 10 and Plate 11. We acknowledge suggestions by a reviewer that improved the text of the paper. KDS and CJM have each received a number of grants to support this work over the years from the Glasgow Natural History Society, Professor Blodwen Lloyd Binns Bequest, and the SOC, for which we are both extremely grateful.

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Revised ms accepted October 2020

Repeat surveys of House Martin colonies in eastern Scotland, 50 and 73 years later

R.W. SUMMERS & B. KALEJTA-SUMMERS

As with many Afro-Palaearctic migrant bird species, the House Martin is declining in numbers across Europe. This decline is apparent in England, but not in Scotland. To add information on its status in Scotland, two repeat surveys were carried out. Visits to cart sheds in farmyards in Fife and Angus showed that colonies present in 1969 had been abandoned, in two cases following accidental poisoning with a pesticide in the 1970s. By contrast, a repeat count of the nests along the Arbroath cliffs in 2020 showed an increase in numbers since 1947.

Introduction

The monitoring of bird populations on farmland in the UK was carried out by the Common Birds Census during the 1960s to the 1990s before changing to the Breeding Bird Survey (Freeman *et al.* 2007). Amongst these populations, there has been particular concern over the status of Afro-Palaearctic migrants. For one of the species, the House Martin *Delichon urbica*, there has been a decline of 20% from 1995 to 2018 (Harris *et al.* 2020), matching the 18% decline in House Martin numbers across Europe from 1980 to 2009 (Vickery *et al.* 2014). As a result of its population decline, the House Martin is an Amber-listed species within the UK (Eaton *et al.* 2015).

The decline in the UK is largely due to the trend in England, where House Martin numbers decreased by 40% from 1995 to 2018, contrasting with a 110% increase in Scotland during the same period (Harris *et al.* 2020). Given this difference between England and Scotland, there is value in repeating counts to shed further light on the Scottish population, especially if a comparison can be made with old data sets.

Plate 12. The cart shed at Lower Kenly in July 1969, where House Martins nested. © *Ron Summers*

Plate 13. The cart shed at Lower Kenly in June 2019, showing farm equipment partially obstructing the entrance to the House Martins' nesting site. © *Ron Summers*

Plate 14. House Martin nests along rafters in the cart shed at Lower Kenly, July 1969. © *Ron Summers*

Plate 15. The Arbroath cliffs north of Auchmithie where a large number of House Martin nests were found, July 2020. © *Bozena Kalejta-Summers*

In eastern Scotland, the first recorded count of House Martin nests was conducted along the cliffs between Arbroath and Ethie Haven (Angus & Dundee), close to the south end of Lunan Bay, by Watson (1947). Previously, it had only been noted that "considerable numbers breed on the cliffs near Lunan Bay" (Jourdain & Witherby 1939). Cliffs represent a natural nesting habitat for House Martins and their use is common throughout the UK (Jourdain & Witherby 1939, Clark & McNeil 1980, Turner & Rose 1989). In addition, David Oliver monitored and ringed House Martins at farmyards in Fife between 1966 and the mid-1970s. Joining David Oliver, Ron Summers counted the House Martin nests at the farmyards in Fife and also one in Angus in 1969 (Summers 1971). These historic data sets of House Martin nest counts at farmyards in Fife and Angus and from the cliffs at Arbroath provided an opportunity to determine if there has been any long-term change at these sites by repeating the counts in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

Methods

Farmyards in Fife and Angus

The farmyards in Fife and Angus were revisited in June 2019, 50 years after the original count of House Martin nests in 1969. These included Muircambus (NO469024) near Elie, Lower Kenly (NO563127) near Boarhills (both in Fife) (Plates 12–13), and Littleton (NO266340) near Tullybaccart in Angus. The farm at Balcomie (NO625098), Fife Ness, was also revisited although there had been no nest count in 1969. At the farmyards, House Martins built their clay nests along the rafters under the entrance arch to the yard and/or cart sheds within the yard (Plate 14).

Cliffs at Arbroath

The repeat survey of the cliffs between Arbroath and Ethie Haven was conducted during 24–26 July 2020, 73 years after Watson's count, which took place during 15 July to 15 August 1947 (Plate 15, Figure 1).

Figure 1. Location of the sites on the Arbroath cliffs, Angus & Dundee, in the House Martin surveys in 1947 and 2020.

Although an effort was made to survey the same sections of cliff in 2020 as in 1947, there was uncertainty over some localities. Most of the cliffs comprised Old Red Sandstone (a sedimentary rock), with only the northern part beyond Auld Mains being igneous rock. The survey was conducted from the shore below the cliffs, but the cliff tops were used when access to the shore was either not possible or time constraints prevented us from surveying from the shore. This lack of time applied to most of the cliff north of Maw Skelly. Instead, the cliff top of this stretch of coast was walked and observations were made from 12 cliff-top points, as well as a short section of cliff that was surveyed from the shore between Auld Mains and the Spectacle.

Plate 16. Three House Martin nests underneath a cliff ledge on a sandstone cliff at Auchmithie, July 2020. © *Bozena Kalejta-Summers*

Plate 17. Four House Martin nests under an overhang on the Auchmithie cliffs, July 2020. According to the pattern of droppings, one recently occupied nest had fallen. © *Bozena Kalejta-Summers*

Plate 18. An adult House Martin departing its nest under an overhang at the Auchmithie cliffs, July 2020. © *Bozena Kalejta-Summers*

The presence of flying House Martins was a good indicator of nests nearby, so 10–20 minutes were spent watching the cliffs for birds flying to their nests, either from the bottom or the top of the cliffs. This proved to be the best way to find nests, especially when conducting the survey from the cliff tops, because most nests were under rock overhangs and therefore difficult to spot from above (Plates 16–18). It was not possible to establish if every nest was occupied, but the following indicators confirmed occupation: if the nest was visited by the adults, if chicks were seen at the nest entrance or if there was an accumulation of fresh droppings below the nest (Plate 17). Nests within *c.* 20 m of others were classed as belonging to the same colony.

Results

Farmyards in Fife and Angus

In 1969, 77 clay nests (maximum of 62 occupied) were present at Muircambus, 38 (maximum of 17 occupied) at Lower Kenly, and 45 (maximum of 36 occupied) at Littleton (Summers 1971). In 2019, no intact nests were found at these sites, nor at Balcomie. Fifty-eight nest scars on the rafters were the only sign of past nesting at Muircambus. The farm had also been abandoned by the farmer, but the cart shed was intact, so it could still have served as a potential breeding site for House Martins. At Lower Kenly, the entrance to the cart shed was partly blocked with farm equipment, and this would have made it difficult for House Martins to access the rafters (Plates 13–14). There were 29 scars of House Martin nests on the rafters. The cart shed entrances at Littleton had been bricked in, blocking all access.

Cliffs at Arbroath

In 1947, 154 occupied nests were found by Watson (1947) between Whiting Ness and Ethie Haven (Table 1). In 2020, 162 nests were counted between Whiting Ness and Maw Skelly (Table 1, Figure 1). This comprised about a half of the cliffs surveyed by Watson (1947). In addition, observations from 12 points along the cliff top north of Maw Skelly produced a total of 71 flying House Martins. This indicated that House Martins were nesting along the entire length of the cliff. A further 11 nests were found between Auld Mains and the Spectacle, where access to the shore was straightforward. These included nests built on igneous rock, as opposed to sandstone for most nests (Plates 16–18).

Table 1. Counts of House Martin nests (colonies and single nests) along the Arbroath cliffs, Angus & Dundee, in 1947 (Watson 1947) and 2020 (this study). Numbers in brackets refer to counts conducted from the cliff top in 2020. See Figure 1 for site locations.

	Nest counts in 1947		Nest counts in 2020	
Section/Site	**Single nests and colonies**	**Total**	**Single nests and colonies**	**Total**
Whiting Ness to Carlingheugh Bay				
Ness	10	10	12	12
Needle E'e/Elephant's Foot	13, 4, 3, 1, 1	22	(3, 3, 4, 5)	15
Mariner's Grave	11, 1, 5, 1	18	9, 1,	10
Dickmont's Den	1, 4, 1, 2	8	(1)	1
Deil's Heid	5	5		
Seal's Cave	2, 3, 1, 6, 2	14		
Carlingheugh Bay	4, 5, 15	24	27, 2	29
Bay north of Carlingheugh Bay			13, 5, 10	28
Gaylet Pot	1	1	(0)	0
Castlesea Bay to Auchmithie	3, 1, 1, 1, 4	10	0	0
Auchmithie to Lunan Bay	2, 1, 2, 3, 1, 1, 10, 11, 1, 1, 1, 8	42		
Auchmithie (Meg's Craig to Maw Skelly)			7, 12, 4, 3, 2, 5, 6, 8, 1, 4, 5, 3, 4, 2, 1	67
Auld Mains to Spectacle			3, 3, 5	11
Total		**154**		**173**

The House Martins foraged over the arable crops adjacent to the cliff top and along the cliffs. The latter was particularly notable on 26 July when a strong west wind was blowing. Under these conditions, the House Martins foraged in the calmer air in the lee of the cliffs.

Discussion

The current survey of the farmyards indicated a collapse in the House Martin population, whilst the survey of the cliffs showed that population was as high, and probably much higher in 2020 than in 1947, given that only half of the cliffs was surveyed in detail. The increase is in accordance with an increase in the number of colonies on the east coast of Scotland between 1940 and 1977 (Clark & McNeil 1980), and the general increase in Scotland as measured by the Breeding Bird Survey (Harris *et al.* 2020).

The absence of breeding House Martins at the farmyards in Fife can be linked back to poisoning incidents in 1973 and 1974, as witnessed by Oliver (1975) during his ringing visits. At Muircambus, when the farmer was preparing a tin-based fungicide (fentin hydroxide) in the yard to control Potato Blight *Phytophthora infestans*, a mixture of water and the chemical was spilled, forming muddy pools in the yard. House Martins were attracted to these pools and were seen drinking and collecting mud for nest construction. Shortly afterwards, there was a decrease in the number of flying birds around the yard and many adult House Martins were found dead in the nests, along with juveniles and chicks that presumably starved. It was assumed that the fungicide had caused their deaths (Oliver 1975). A count of 23 pairs early in the season was reduced to two occupied nests by House Martins. The poisoning took place during the rearing of the first brood, thereby affecting the production of young for the entire breeding season. A similar incident took place at Balcomie farm, Fife Ness. There were *c.* 30 pairs observed building nests, but this site was later abandoned, and dead birds were found in every nest (Oliver 1975). Over the last 45 years, House Martins have not returned to these farms. The practice of using fentin hydroxide (a chemical that is no longer approved for use) on potatoes was common in Fife, so it possible that other colonies were also affected. However, House Martins currently inhabit other areas within Fife, such as Ladybank Station (NO306097) and Stratheden Hospital (NO348130), each with over 50 nests in 2019 (D. Oliver pers. comm.).

The difference between the two types of nesting habitat shows that the wrong conclusion could have been reached with regard to the local population of House Martins if only the farmyards were considered and the historical background of poisoning was unknown. Birds nesting on farms are exposed to the vicissitudes of farming practices (Newton 2017) and, although cliffs are less subject to environmental change, their food supply can be affected by the management of arable crops adjacent to cliffs. The House Martins' foraging habitat along the Arbroath cliffs included arable fields and adjacent cliff faces. It is likely that there have been changes in the application of insecticides and herbicides on crops since 1947, but the vegetation on the cliff faces and immediate tops has probably remained unchanged.

Because of the position of the cliff nests, it was preferable to survey from the shore, to ensure that the majority of the nests were counted. Watson (1947) did not state whether the counts were made from the top or from below the cliffs but stated that he counted only occupied nests. In our survey, we counted all intact clay nests, but most appeared to be occupied. Watson (1947) found that many of the House Martins nested singly. This was in contrast to our study where single nests were uncommon (Table 1). This difference, however, may be due to different interpretations of what constituted a colony. Watson (1947) noted that House Martins avoided nesting close to Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus*. In our survey, Herring Gulls nested commonly along the Arbroath cliffs and one colony of House Martins was situated close to a colony of gulls. However, we also noted that House Martins avoided the colonies of Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*.

This study has emphasised the importance of retaining details of locations and methods used, so that the same criteria can be applied in repeated surveys. In our study, the northern part of the Arbroath cliffs was not surveyed in detail. Therefore, a complete contemporary survey of the Arbroath cliffs would be valuable to fully compare with Watson's survey in 1947. It would also be useful to ascertain the extent to which House Martins forage for insects over arable crops as opposed to along the cliffs.

Acknowledgements

We thank Mike Nicoll for providing us with Watson's unpublished article, and Norman Atkinson and Dave Oliver for additional information and comments on the draft.

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Revised ms accepted October 2020

The arrival, and subsequent first confirmed breeding, of Nuthatches in North-East Scotland

Plate 19. Nuthatch, Netherley, North-East Scotland, 28 August 2010. © *A. Tulloch & I. Morrison*

Plate 20. Nuthatch, Glassel/Torphins, North-East Scotland, 26 April 2020. © *Morag Cole*

Plate 21. Adult Nuthatch, Dinnet Oakwood NNR, North-East Scotland, 21 May 2020. © *Tony Hilton*

The first confirmed breeding record of Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* in Scotland was as recent as 1989 (Murray 1991), but, despite a remarkable expansion in its range in Scotland over the last 30 years (Maxwell 2010, McMillan 2018), it remains an extremely rare bird in North-East Scotland. The first regional record was in 2010 (Tulloch & Morrison 2010; Plate 19), and up until the start of 2020 there had only been four records accepted by the North-East Scotland Rarities Committee (NESRC):

2010: 28–29 August, single, Netherley (A. Tulloch, I. Morrison & P.A.A. Baxter)

2011: 7 February, single, Newtonhill (M. Simmons)

2011: 13 April, single, Portsoy (H. D'Arcy)

2017: 17 April, single, Rora (A. Geering & L. Geering)

The records were all of single birds visiting garden feeders, with only the initial Netherley bird lingering for more than a day. However, the spring of 2020 saw an unprecedented run of reports of Nuthatches across the region, with the following records submitted to NESRC:

2020: 2 March, single, followed by four further sightings on garden feeders between 24 September–18 December, Inchmarlo, Banchory (R. & M. Cinderey)

2020: 19–20 April, single, on garden feeders at Inverey, near Braemar (E. Bolton & P. Bolton)

2020: 26 April, single, on garden feeders between Glassel and Torphins (M. Cole, Plate 20)

2020: 29 April, single, on garden feeders at Udny, near Ellon (D. Fleming)

2020: 21 May, pair, at Dinnet Oakwood NNR (A.C. Hilton *et al.*, Plate 21)

2020: 15 June, pair, at Tollohill, near Banchory-Devenick (C. Cameron)

Two additional records have come to light, although descriptions have yet to be received:

2020: 4 April, pair, in Battlehill Wood, near Huntly (pers. comm.)

2020: 6 April, single, near Cleanbrae Farm, Bin Forest (pers. comm.)

Ongoing COVID-19 lockdown restrictions meant that it was difficult for some of the 2020 sightings to be followed up immediately, though

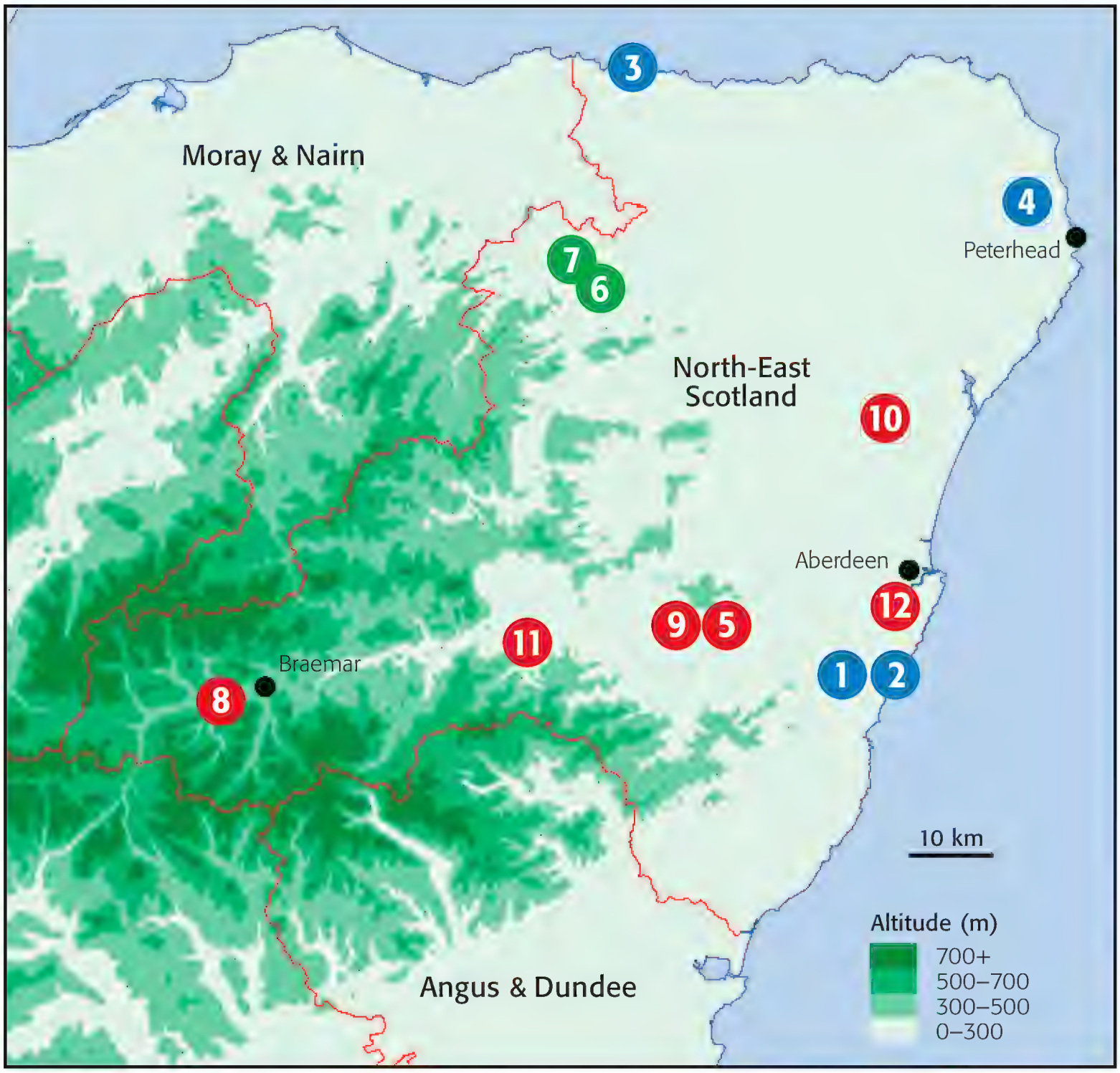

Figure 1. Map of North-East Scotland indicating the order and location of Nuthatch records to date. Blue = pre-2020 records; red = verified 2020 records; green = unverified 2020 records.

Ian Broadbent and others did visit Tollohill on several separate occasions in June and July but there was no further sign of these birds. There have been no further reports from the Huntly/Bin Forest area, although survey effort has been limited. Fortunately, Harry Scott was able to monitor the birds at Dinnet Oakwood NNR, in mid-Deeside, from late May onwards. The habitat appears ideal for Nuthatch and is comprised of an extensive area of Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea,* Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and birch *Betula* spp., as well as conifers, including mature Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris.* Following the initial sighting on 21 May, the birds proved to be extremely elusive, with 15 blank visits before the next sighting of the birds in the same area as the original observation. A subsequent sighting of up to four birds at the site on 27 June suggested that breeding had successfully taken place, but it was not until 4 July that the presence of juvenile Nuthatches was confirmed and photographed (Plate 22). A minimum of four juveniles accompanied by two adults was seen on this date. During this particularly active two-week period, presumably the result of the young having just left the nest, the birds were readily located by call, but became progressively less vocal over the following weeks, and were very elusive again during August. However, a minimum of 4–5 birds were still present in late

Plate 22. Juvenile Nuthatch, Dinnet Oakwood NNR, North-East Scotland, 4 July 2020. © *Harry Scott*

Plate 23. Adult Nuthatch, Dinnet Oakwood NNR, North-East Scotland, 27 September 2020. © *Harry Scott*

September, when they were regularly observed flying out of Dinnet Oakwood, across the River Dee, visiting a garden with feeders on the north side of the river.

These records from Dinnet Oakwood NNR represent the first confirmed breeding of Nuthatches in North-East Scotland, but with young of this year dispersing and several large areas of suitable habitat elsewhere in the region, it is likely that it will not be the last. We look forward to the 2021 breeding season and encourage observers in the region to monitor their local woodland for the presence of Nuthatch in the spring.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to those who reported Nuthatch sightings in the region over the years, but to Tony Hilton in particular, for alerting us to the presence of Nuthatches in Dinnet Oakwood NNR allowing Harry to monitor these birds during the remainder of the 2020 season.

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ms accepted September 2020

Breeding Teal in Fife

During my 35 years of birding in Fife, I have never personally been able to confirm the breeding of Teal *Anas crecca* in the region. That changed in 2020, when I found a female with a brood of three ducklings in late July. It renewed my interest in the species' breeding status, especially after my involvement in two Fife breeding atlases ((Elkins *et al.* 2003, 2016). On searching the literature, it appears that there have only been about 15 confirmed breeding records of Teal in Fife during the past 40 years.

A somewhat secretive species in the breeding season, Teal prefer undisturbed waters bordered by dense vegetation. Although small numbers remain throughout the summer, breeding is difficult to confirm. Teal are single-brooded, with an average clutch of 8–11 eggs. The incubation period is 21–23 days and another 25–30 days elapse before the young fledge. In lowland Scotland, peak egg-laying is probably in early to mid-May (Forrester *et al.* 2007). This suggests that most ducklings fledge by early July but some are clearly much later. The brood I recorded in 2020 was quite well grown, but when one flapped its stubby wings, it was obviously some days away from flight. In the 19th century, Teal were abundant in the Tay faunal district (which includes north Fife) and common in the Forth faunal district (including south Fife) (Holloway 1996). Atkinson-Willes (1963) mentioned that the Teal was a common breeding species on Tents Muir in the north-east of Fife but this was prior to the area's afforestation from the 1920s. Grierson (1962) found it still regular there in the 1950s, both at Earlshall (*c.* 15 pairs) and Morton Lochs. He also acknowledged that the decrease had begun as early as the late 19th century and this has been generally attributed to habitat loss. In the past 30 years, some small waters have vanished, while others have become established, such as in former sand and gravel pits. Although arguably not part of Fife, a clutch was found on 15 May 1960 on the Isle of May, the island's only known, but unsuccessful, breeding record (Eggeling 1961). There is little further information until the fieldwork for the first national breeding atlas (Sharrock 1976). This mapped confirmed breeding records between 1968 and 1972 in the 10 km squares NS98, NO20, NO21, NO40 and NO42. It has long been considered that the Teal is a scarce breeding species in Fife (Elkins *et al.* 2016) and is

Table 1. Confirmed breeding records of Teal in Fife, 1980–2020.

No.	Year(s)	Site	10 km/tetrad	Details	Date	Source
1	1980	Wemyss	NT39	clutch of 3	11 April	*FBR*
2	1981	Morton Lochs	NO42T	brood of 6	undated	*FBR*
3	1982	Falkland	NO20	no details	undated	*FBR*
4	1983	Ballo reservoir	NO20	2 pairs	undated	*FBR*
5	1984	Ballo reservoir	NO20	no details	undated	*FBR*
6	1988–91	unknown	NT39	no details	unknown	Gibbons *et al.* 1993
7	1991	Loch Gelly	NT19W	brood of 4	21 July	*FBR*, *FBA*
8	1992	Dun Moss	NS99W	no details	undated	*FBR*, *FBA*
9	1993	Loch Gelly	NT19W	2♀ 7 young	undated	*FBR*
10	1993	Birnie Loch	NO21W	brood	undated	*FBA*
11	1996	Tentsmuir	NO42W	no details	undated	*FBA*
12	2005	Moor Loch	NS98P	clutch of 10	undated	*FBR*
13	2015	Letham Pools	NO31B/C	brood of 7	12 July	*FBR*
14	2019	Cullaloe LNR	NT18Y	brood of 1?	14 July	BirdTrack
15	2020	The Wilderness	NO31A	brood of 3	29 July	N. Elkins

Notes: No. 1. The very early date is dubious, but laying was possibly stimulated by a warm, very dry, and very sunny April.
No. 6. Was not listed in any *Fife Bird Report* (*FBR*).
No. 7. Was also mapped in *The Fife Bird Atlas* (*FBA*) (Elkins *et al.* 2003).
No. 8. Was reported in the relevant *FBR* but with no details. It is probably that mapped in *FBA*.
No. 9. May have been a crèche involving two broods.
No. 12. All eggs hatched successfully but there was no further information.
No. 14. Details uncertain - a count of two and a code FL (recently fledged young) were entered on BirdTrack and interpreted as an adult and duckling. Three adults were present on 8th July.

currently on the UK amber list due to both population and range declines (Eaton *et al.* 2015). Annual *Fife Bird Reports* (*FBR*), first published in 1980, documented Teal as a scarce but regular breeding species in the early 1980s with further occasional records thereafter (Table 1). Full details for some of these records were not available. Tetrad identifiers (2 km squares) are added if known.

The species has essentially maintained its breeding distribution in upland habitats in Scotland but the decline in lowland eastern Scotland has been revealed in the numerous atlases that have been published since Sharrock (1976). However, coverage for atlases varies, especially when fieldwork for regional and national surveys is carried out in different years and on different scales (tetrads vs 10 km squares) e.g. in Fife (Elkins *et al.* 2003). Adjacent to Fife, Loch Leven in Perth and Kinross has been a fairly regular breeding site (Lauder 2007). Although breeding was confirmed there in all national atlases, a complete coverage of Kinross tetrads for the latest (Balmer *et al.* 2013) confirmed breeding in only one tetrad in 2008 and 2009, with two broods in the latter year. There have been no further records from this locality. Despite the paucity of confirmed breeding records in the two Fife breeding atlases, it was estimated that there could have been 36 pairs in Fife in the 1990s, with a similar population (30–40 pairs) some 15–20 years later. Table 1 highlights the sites (and 10 km squares) where breeding is probably fairly regular but undetected. Of the sites listed, some are long established, such as Ballo Reservoir, Cullaloe, Moor Loch and Loch Gelly. All have fringing dense vegetation on some shorelines and may remain regular breeding sites. Tentsmuir Forest retains pools where Teal may also still breed. Birnie Loch and the Wilderness are both flooded former sand and gravel pits and have dense shoreline vegetation, although human disturbance at the former may now be detrimental. Letham Pools is a recent wetland, formed when flooded fields remained undrained and where dense reedbeds have since colonised the shore.

I suspect that the breeding population has remained relatively unchanged in Fife since the region's atlas estimates. Given the duration of incubation and fledging, June and July are the best months to locate broods. Furthermore, considering the clutch size, brood counts suggest that the attrition of eggs and broods by the end of July can be substantial. In August, most remaining ducklings will be almost indistinguishable from moulting adults. These factors, plus the species' concealment in the breeding season, militate against detection. The breeding status of Teal is clearly under-recorded so that more effort should be given to monitoring inland waters for likely breeding birds. It is important that all records, with full details, should be submitted to an appropriate recording scheme. Past records can be uploaded into BirdTrack.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Graham Sparshott and Alistair Shuttleworth for updating me on the 2019 record and Allan Brown for inland WeBS data. Rosie Filipiak and William Penrice answered my questions on *FBA* data in the archives of the SOC and Fife BRC respectively and Tony Wilson confirmed the Birnie Loch record. Vicky Turnbull and Neil Mitchell provided information on Loch Leven.

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Revised ms accepted September 2020

American Bittern in Caithness, 1862

Following our note describing the discovery of the specimen of an American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus* at the Glasgow Museums Resource Centre (McInerny & Sutcliffe 2020), more information about the record has been brought to our attention by Keith Naylor (Naylor 2020).

A date of 3 November for the bird being shot at Latheronwheel, Caithness has been established, though there remains contradiction about the year. We reported that the label on the back of the specimen box lists 1863. However, 'M.A.S.' in *The Field* published on 6 December 1862 states 'I shot on the moors in Caithness, on the 3rd of last month, what I presume, from Mr. Yarrell's description, to be a specimen of [American Bittern]' (M.A.S. 1862).

John Alexander Harvie-Brown in September 1885 saw the boxed specimen and label 'in Mr. Small's shop in Edinburgh, in fine preservation. Mr. Small had purchased it about 27 months previously at a sale at Dowell's Auction Rooms, and soon after sold it to the Earl of Haddington, in whose collection it is now' (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1887). Seeing the label, he noted it as shot in 1863. That it entered the collection of the Earl of Haddington explains its presence in Glasgow Museums Resource Centre, as several specimens from this source were acquired by Glasgow Museums. However, as 'M.A.S.' reported it shot in a December 1862 issue of *The Field* this indicates that 1862 must be correct, and so the year 1863 on the specimen box label is erroneous. Therefore, the Latheronwheel, Caithness American Bittern was shot on 3 November 1862.

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Revised ms accepted September 2020

Thank you for your support
Meeting Hub
3:00pm
Meet and Greet
3:15pm – 3:45pm
Welcome from SOC President & Talk by Nigel Clark: What next for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper: Extinction is not an option!
5:00pm
84th SOC Annual General Meeting (SOC Members Only)
Dinner Break and Socialising
6:30pm – 7:30pm
SOC
MORE INFORMATION
Click on an event to learn more about it
CATALYST

Plate 24. OnAIR event portal screenshot.

SOC 2020 VIRTUAL AGM EVENT

As we were unable to gather at the Atholl Palace Hotel for our usual annual Club get-together last year, the 84th SOC Annual General Meeting was held online and some additional events were scheduled either side of the meeting by way of providing members and non-members alike with a form of *mini* virtual conference, which we referred to as our '2020 AGM Event'.

We had just over 100 registrations and a total of £270 was raised from participants who were able to make the optional donation in lieu of a registration fee. We are very grateful to all those who donated, which helped to cover over half the cost of the event platform.

The event took place on Saturday 21 November, hosted on a bespoke conference platform ('OnAIR') supplied by Catalyst EPS, the Perth-based company that we use to hire our physical PA and AV conference equipment. It was doors open from 3pm for participants to mingle on the platform's *speed* meet-and-greet event. After a brief welcome and introduction from SOC President, Ian Bainbridge, attendees sat back in the comfort of their own homes to listen to an excellent and fascinating talk by guest speaker, Nigel Clark, on the plight of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

What next for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper? Extinction is not an option!

Nigel Clark is the Scientific Advisor to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force and has been involved in the species conservation since 2008.

It is well known that we are losing shorebirds globally, but the greatest losses are amongst species that migrate along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF). The Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) is one of these, breeding in Arctic Russia it migrates to the Yellow Sea area where it goes through its autumn moult, then flies onwards to its wintering grounds, which are spread across South East Asia. It was projected in 2010 that the SBS numbers halved every two years: whilst adult annual survival was reasonable, few chicks fledged successfully and recruitment into the adult population was extremely low, giving a rate of decline whereby it was considered the species could be extinct by 2018/19.

Plate 25. Nigel Clark, virtual conference screenshot

With numbers of the species in the low hundreds and their geographic range spread over some twenty countries, conservation of the bird has to be collaborative with many different organizations across nations involved to cover the very different cultures, languages and politics.

The Task Force identified the main conservation needs as stopping habitat loss and land claim, preventing Spartina (invasive coastal weed) encroachment, reducing hunting and by-catch, education, and conservation breeding. Along the flyway, these identified risks varied geographically and therefore needed tailored targeting. The scientists, researchers and other key people involved brought their passion, dedication and influence to the task of saving the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Habitat loss through land claim was a particular risk in the areas where the birds moulted; in one example of a South Korean site, land claim in 2006 reduced numbers from between 50 and 200 down to fewer than 15 thereafter. Land reclamation of coastal mudflats is technically relatively easy to achieve, so the SBS Task Force was hugely encouraged by the 2018 introduction of a law by the Chinese Government banning further land claim. This managed to save a site earmarked for imminent reclamation that some 40–50% of the SBS use during their moult.

Hunting and by-catch reduction required a country-by-country approach. In China, small birds are eaten as a delicacy and in Russia they are hunted for recreation, but in countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar they provide an essential protein source in subsistence communities. This latter issue was of particular importance since a pre-2010 survey found that some 15 individual hunters had caught at least 135 SBS in the previous five years. Members of the Task Force met with village elders to discuss a change to their livelihoods and with help and support they were able to switch to fishing for their protein source.

Plate 26. Spoon-billed Sandpiper, 19 December 2020. A bird that the SBS Task Force glued a temporary satellite tag on in 2017. © *Li Yunfeng*

Such actions have reduced a number of risks to SBS and all shorebirds of the flyway have benefited from these targeted protection measures. However, whilst SBS numbers may be rising very slowly, starting from such a low level means considerable time and continued work are still needed to secure the species from extinction. Funding too continues to be needed, particularly to further the education work being done. This has involved meetings to educate hunters, grants for farming, and informing and engaging schoolchildren in all nations down the flyway.

With only one breeding colony in the wild holding more than a couple of pairs, conservation breeding was considered to be essential to supplement the wild population and allow for reintroduction to boost numbers in the wild. Scientists had perfected the technique in 2010 using Dunlin, and in 2011, 20 SBS eggs were collected from the Russian breeding grounds (the wild birds subsequently re-laid replacement clutches) and hatched at Slimbridge, United Kingdom, where it is hoped a viable captive population can be maintained. Head-starting in this way gets around the most vulnerable part of a ground-nesting bird's life from egg to fledging; a naturally nesting SBS pair with four eggs on average fledges 0.6 chicks, whereas a head-started four-egg clutch fledges an average of 3.2 chicks. There have been more than 200 releases of head-started birds in Russia, and 26% of them have subsequently been seen on migration.

More recent work has seen researchers attaching satellite tags to the backs of SBS before their migration. This has highlighted North Korea as a major moulting site, confirmed the use of known sites, and identified new moult sites where hunting mitigation measures were needed. The first record of a wintering SBS in North Sumatra, Indonesia, was identified from tagging, as was the current use of known historic wintering sites.

To conclude, saving the Spoon-billed Sandpiper requires many teams in different places, and a lot of dedication, effort and ongoing funding.

Following the talk, Nigel answered a number of questions from the audience:

On head-starting

As many eggs as can realistically be taken are head-started, currently about 30 per year. It is necessary to rear the birds in cohorts to achieve the best results, and human intervention must be kept to an absolute minimum. The process requires considerable ongoing financial support, so funding, past and present, is absolutely invaluable in this respect.

On captive breeding

Since the species experiences a wide range of temperatures throughout the year, with High Arctic breeding and moulting/wintering in the Tropics, the captive breeding site was chosen to be suitable at all times of year. The captive breeding flock can be likened to an insurance policy.

On SBS diet

At the breeding grounds, SBS feed on insects and berries; crabs and shrimps are eaten on the moulting and wintering grounds. It is not known exactly what the bill is adapted for, but it is an amazing sense organ and the bird can take large prey for its size. In captivity, the birds are fed insectivorous bird food.

On SBS and climate change in Siberia

The SBS breeding grounds in Russia are close to a major marine upwelling so the area stays very cold and currently has been minimally impacted by climate change.

On SBS and other wader species

There are some 28 countries in the geographic range of the SBS and people are working in every country to help them. Work to protect SBS also benefits other waders using the same area; for example, the cessation of hunting in Myanmar's Gulf of Mottama has seen an increase in wader numbers from 35,000 to 65,000 four years later. Similarly, publicity and work on other declining waders can benefit the SBS.

On tagging and future plans

The Task Force hopes to increase tagging and has funding from the International Conservation Fund of Canada (ICFC) for tagging northbound migrants. This could help find new breeding sites, but as it is a stressful time for birds, smaller tags are needed. Currently tags fitted at the breeding sites are glued to the birds' backs and often come off in the autumn moult.

For more information on the campaign to save the SBS, visit: www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com/spoon-billed-sandpipers

Rosie Filipiak (SOC Staff)

After the talk, there was a brief break while participants logged into the AGM session. Ian Bainbridge introduced his fellow office bearers before getting down to the business on the agenda. Ian spoke to the new-look Annual Report and Accounts, which was produced in digital format only this year and serves as an attractive and clear overview of the Club's activities and achievements in relation to its charitable aims. Andrew Thorpe, SOC Treasurer, spoke to the year's accounts and included a few words on the impact of COVID-19 since the financial year-end (31 March), noting that in light of reduced overheads, donations from members, and some Government assistance, the Club was actually showing a small but welcome surplus.

Plate 27. Branch Recognition Award recipient Alex Joss. © *Alex Joss*

Plate 28. Branch Recognition Award recipient Ian Francis. © *Nicky Penford*

Participants were invited to vote on a number of items using the Live Poll function on their screens. All items were approved: the Minutes of the 83rd AGM; the 2019/20 Annual Report and Accounts; the re-appointment of Whitelaw Wells as independent financial examiner, and the re-appointment of Will Cresswell as Elected Council Member. Ian thanked Will for his contribution to date and for agreeing to remain on Council for a further three-year term.

Ian also noted that Andrew Thorpe was standing down as Treasurer at the end of the current financial year and praised Andrew for his excellent work on the Club's finances these past four years.

To finish the session, this year's recipients of the Branch Recognition Awards were commended for their notable contribution to their respective local groups: Ian Francis (North-East Scotland) and Alex Joss (Highland).

A dinner break followed with the social session on the portal kept open throughout. Unfortunately, only a handful of participants attended the quiz, this a combination of technical issues and possibly also of having scheduled the session for prime time on a Saturday evening. Thanks to past quizmasters (and former SOC Presidents) David Jardine and Ian Thomson, and Aberlady Bay warden, John Harrison, we had a fantastic set of questions lined up. As such, we plan to run the quiz again at this year's conference, when we very much hope to be back at the Atholl Palace Hotel.

If you missed the AGM and/or Nigel's talk, recordings of both are available on YouTube via the following links:

What next for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper?
- youtu.be/3XppVjiD698

84th SOC Annual General Meeting
- youtu.be/woDSXOH6Teg

NEWS AND NOTICES

New members

Caithness: Ms A. McPartlin, **Central Scotland:** Drs D. & R. Abel, Mr M. Shanks, **Clyde:** Mrs K. Barr, Mr C. Bergin, Mr G. Brines, Mr J. Brown, Mr R. Conn, Mrs D. Gray, Mr S. Kerr, Mr M. Martin, Mr L. McDonald, Ms A. Nicholls, Ms C. Page, Mr J. Smith, Mr J. Watson, Mr G. Wilson, **Fife:** Mr E. Hepburn, Mr A. Martin & Ms M. Tuckerman, **Highland:** Mr A. Carmichael, Mr D. Harris, **Lothian:** Mr H. Baker, Mr J. Balfour-Manson, Mr J. Crawford, Mrs J. Harman, Ms L. Hoad, Ms S. Khimji & Mr C. Wallbank, Mr & Mrs T. Lai, Mr P. Maguire, Miss R. McGrory, Ms A. Meikle, Mr A. & S. Murray, Mr & Mrs E. Parks, Dr J. Rowland, Mr P. Shinton, Ms J. Urquhart, Ms S. Whitehouse, **North-East Scotland:** Professor J. Bevan, Mr G. Jones, Mr M. Watson, **Orkney:** Mrs S. Hallam, **Scotland - no branch:** Mr E. Maguire, Mr D. Preston, **Tayside:** Miss C. Cooper.

Plate 29. Shenaz Khimji, Waterston House, November 2020. © *Rosie Filipiak*

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, 19 March 2022, Elgin

We are pleased to announce that the conference originally scheduled to take place in Elgin in March 2020 has been postponed to next spring, in the hope that we can host the full physical event in Moray as planned. Booking information will be circulated nearer the time.

SOC Annual Conference & AGM, 19–21 November 2021, Atholl Palace Hotel

A provisional booking has been made with the Atholl Palace in the hope that we will be able to return to the venue to hold this year's event. Programme and booking information will be circulated to members in due course.

Waterston House update

Opening Hours

Thursday–Sunday 10.00am–4.00pm

Staff can still be reached Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm. If calling outside of Waterston House opening hours, a recorded message on the office telephone (01875 871330) will direct your call. Or you can email your enquiry to mail@the-soc.org.uk

Please check the SOC website for any updates to these opening hours, as well as COVID-19 safety measures in place and the availability of facilities.

Welcome to new staff member, Shenaz Khimji

Shenaz joined the front-of-house team at Waterston House in November as our weekend Visitor Experience Officer. Although her academic background is in Anthropology and Fine Art, and Primate Conservation, she has long held a keen interest in birds. She brings a wealth of customer service experience to the role at HQ, having worked as Wildlife Officer for many years on large cruise ships and a spell working at RSPB Forsinard Flows visitor centre. Shenaz also has an interest in wildlife art and has supported the SWLA annual show at Mall Galleries for many years. Shenaz can be contacted at: info@the-soc.org.uk

Art exhibitions

Solo exhibition 'Song Lines' by Val O'Regan, January–February 2021.

Plate 30. Flight of Curiosity. © *Val O'Regan*

Last year, the SOC collaborated with the National Library of Scotland (NLS) to digitise many of the Club's audio recordings as part of a national Lottery-funded project, *Unlocking Our Sound Heritage* (*Scottish Birds* 39(4) & 40(3)). An important aspect of the project was the appointment of an artist in residence, Val O'Regan.

Val organised workshops for children and adults to create artworks inspired by the SOC's recordings as well as developing her own work in response to the collection. Val explains: "Being out in the field through sound, second hand, from an event that happened long ago was a powerful and nostalgic experience. Even the listening experience, where and when I listened to the recordings, influenced my reactions." Val managed the seemingly impossible task of rendering this experience visually, using collage and printmaking; images were cut, layered and fragmented to better represent the disparate inputs, the impact of listening to the sound recordings, as well as the narratives and environments encountered during the project.

We were delighted to have the opportunity to hang a selection of Val's work from the project in anticipation of Waterston House re-opening to the public in mid-January. However, at the time of writing, the lockdown prevails and it is looking very unlikely that we will be opening our doors before Val's slot is scheduled to finish. To this end, SOC Exhibitions Coordinator, Laura Gressani, produced a video of the show (featuring recordings from the audio archive as a soundtrack) to be able to share it with our art contacts and followers on social media. We look forward to hosting the exhibition again in the future.

For more information on Val's work, check her website: www.valoregan.com At the time of writing, the NLS has completed the digitisation of the SOC sound archive but it is not yet available to the public. We will keep members posted on developments.

Joint exhibition 'Painted Wings' by Helga Chart, Claire Harkess and Derek Robertson, March–April 2021 (TBC - check SOC website).

This exhibition brings together the work of three established Scottish artists recognised in particular for their mastery of watercolour media: all are elected members of RSW (The Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Watercolour). While their work is rooted in the observation of nature, it invariably captures other things: a moment in time, a sense of place, a deeper concern for the world and our place in it.

Helga Chart was born in Edinburgh and studied at Edinburgh Art College. A couple of years ago, Helga travelled to St Kilda and the Baltic Sea, places she had long wanted to visit. Much of the work in this exhibition is inspired by these trips. Birds are a constant source of inspiration, not least for their symbolic and folklore significance, as they help Helga create the sense of place that is at the heart of her work.

Plate 31. Storm bird. © *Helga Chart*

Claire Harkess grew up in Ayr and studied at Glasgow School of Art. An early residency at Edinburgh Zoo was the start of a twenty-year path observing the natural world, visiting remote and

fragile environments such as Antarctica, Svalbard, or the Galapagos. Claire explains the inspiration for the work in this exhibition: "In 2020, lockdown walks exploring my urban environment became routine and a good starting point for many paintings and ink drawings executed on a variety of fine Chinese papers. It was also the opportunity to re-imagine memories from times spent further afield." In 2017, Claire was awarded the Wildlife Artist of the Year prize by the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation.

Plate 32. Bullrush blue. © *Claire Harkess*

Derek Robertson was born and raised in Fife. Since graduating from Duncan of Jordanstone College in Dundee, Derek has become an internationally acclaimed and multi-award-winning wildlife artist. The work in this exhibition is inspired by local places such as the Isle of May or the Tay Reedbeds, but also draws on his current project, "Testaments of Loss". This portrays the small-scale environmental losses that he has observed at first hand over the past 30 years.

Plate 33. Where the ice melts. © *Derek Robertson*

Joint Exhibition by John Threlfall, Esther Tyson and Simon Griffiths, April–May 2021 (TBC - check SOC website).

We are delighted to welcome back a regular exhibitor to Waterston House, John Threlfall, this time in a joint exhibition with Esther Tyson, accompanied by sculptures by Simon Griffiths.

After 26 years in Dumfries and Galloway, John moved north east to Deeside two years ago and has enjoyed the challenge of responding to a new landscape and its wildlife. One of his favourite places in the north east is the Ythan estuary and the adjacent Forvie NNR. He set himself the project to visit the site on a weekly basis throughout the winter, and the work resulting from these visits forms the core of his contribution to this exhibition.

Plate 34. Ythan 1. © *John Threlfall*

Born in Cumbria, Esther Tyson studied at Cumbria Art College, the University of Wales and the Royal College of Art (London). When at the RCA, Esther won a travel scholarship to Slovakia. This trip ignited her passion for travel as well as painting wild creatures in their natural environment, and many other trips followed. Esther is based in the South Peak District, and took the opportunity presented by this exhibition to travel to the Highlands and catch new sights and subjects. The work here is largely based on this experience. Esther recently won the Birdwatch/Swarovski Artist of the Year award 2020.

Simon Griffiths is a sculptor based in County Durham. He draws his inspiration from the direct observations of animals and strives to

Plate 35. Stonechat. © *Esther Tyson*

Plate 36. Goldfinch. © *Simon Griffiths*

capture their essential qualities and movement. He works primarily in high fired ceramics, allowing him to create sculptures that can be displayed outdoors as well as indoors.

Branch updates

Talks and Outings

The branch talks programme continues to be delivered via online video conferencing (Zoom) until the end of the current season (April). We are hopeful that indoor meetings at local venues will resume from September but will keep members informed. We hope to continue being able to offer an online option to include members who are unable to attend the physical meetings and staff are working on the best way to deliver this.

Important: Sign up for branch activity emails

If you do not already receive our email communications and wish to receive notices of branch talks, outings and/or news, please complete the short sign-up form on the SOC website: www.the-soc.org.uk/gdpr-consent or you can email Kathryn Cox to check or update your mailing list preferences: admin@the-soc.org.uk

No email access? Contact your branch Secretary

For members who do not have access to the internet to be able to check the SOC website or receive the email notices, please call your local branch Secretary to check for details of any outings that may be running.

New contacts

Tayside, change of Secretary: Rachael Wilbourn, Tel: 07708 547175, Email: rachael.v.wilbourn@gmail.com

Rachael joined the branch committee in November and took up the reins of Secretary from December. Council is grateful to Rachael for stepping up to take on this vital role in the SOC Tayside group and wishes her well. Many thanks go to outgoing Secretary, Brian Brocklehurst, for his time and effort given to running branch activities during his almost eight-year tenure.

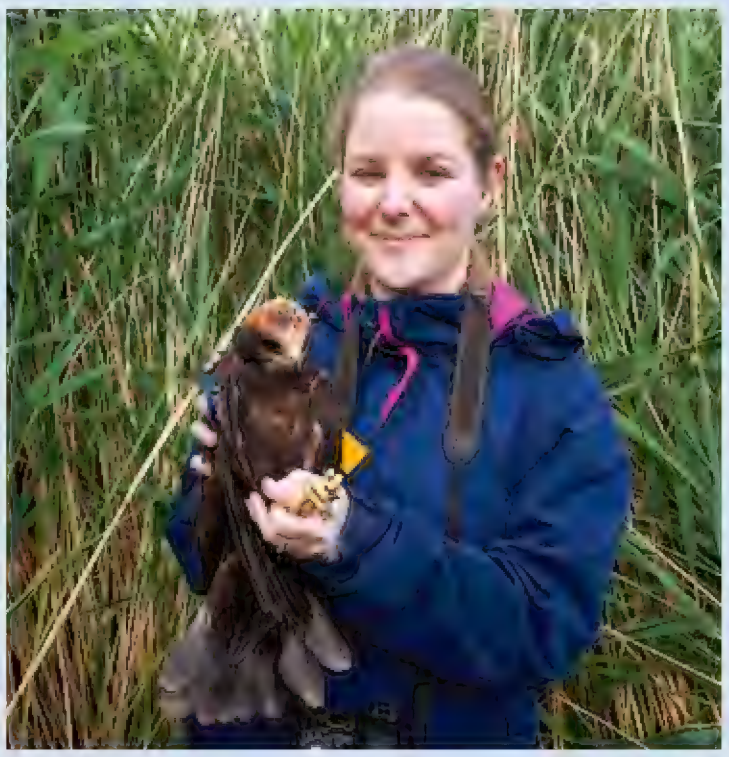

Plate 37. Rachael Wilbourn, Tayside Branch Secretary. © *Tay Ringing Group*

The branch has also appointed a new Chair in the form of long-standing member and respected naturalist, Anne Reid. Anne has taken over from John Campbell, who steps down after twelve years in the role. Council thanks John for chairing the branch during this time.

Clyde area bird news now on Twitter

Did you know that bird news for the region (visit the Club's website for a definition of the area covered) can now be found by visiting @Clydebirding on Twitter (www.twitter.com/Clydebirding)? You don't need a Twitter account to view the page. Run by members of the local branch, the account is a new, fantastic and regularly updated resource. If you're birdwatching in the region (assuming current COVID-19 restrictions allow it) and have sightings to pass on, please tag @Clydebirding in your tweet.

Plate 38. Dotterel on Lowther Hill, Clyde, 2 May 2019. © *Ian Fulton*

The Howietoun Heritage & Nature Sanctuary Trust

When Sharon Pearson of the Howietoun Fishery near Stirling contacted the SOC office in February 2019 for advice and information, she was referred to Central Scotland branch stalwart, Neil Bielby. Neil made contact and explained that he had wildlife records for the area from 2010 until 2014 and was delighted to be able to return. He enlisted other naturalists who also visited the site. Roger Stewart contributed photography while Roger and Mary Gooch carried out wildflower surveys. Their support was pivotal to the project and the Trust was founded in December 2020. The demarcated historic fishery area is being gifted by Sharon Pearson to the new Charity. The trustees have shown their gratitude by erecting a plaque.

Plate 39. Neil Bielby at Howietoun, Stirling, December 2020. © *Anon*

This Oak Tree is dedicated
with gratitude to
Neil Bielby, born 23 Sept 1950,
who has monitored & recorded
the sights & sounds of nature
here since 2010. His work is
invaluable in creating awareness,
now & for future generations,
of all the precious species & the
diversity of habitat to be protected
for their survival.
(October 2020)

Plate 40. Neil Bielby plaque at Howietoun, Stirling, October 2020. © *Anon*

Lothian Bird Report 2018

The Lothian Bird Report for 2018, edited by Ian Andrews and Keith Gillon, is now available. At the time of writing, copies are available for £10 from Waterston House and Viking Optical Centre, 101 Rose Street, Edinburgh (please check that these outlets are open before travelling). The report can also be ordered by post (for £11.60 including p&p). Details of how to order can be found on the branch website: www.the-soc.org.uk/birdrecording/local-recorders-network/areas/lothian.

2019 Highland Bird Report

A digital version of the latest Highland Bird Report is available free to download from the branch website: www.highlandbirds.scot A printed copy can be purchased from Alex Joss, 8 Green Drive, Inverness IV2 4EX, e-mail ejoss99@btinternet.com, tel. 01463 221661. Please contact Alex to check availability and price (from £10 plus p&p).

Norman Elkins retires from Library Committee

Norman is well known to many SOC members, through his work with the Fife Branch - including as lead author of the recent *Breeding and Wintering Birds of Fife*, through his many books and other publications on birds and weather, as a speaker, or from meeting him at conferences and other get-togethers. He is also a shining example to us all, digitising his lifetime's bird observations for BirdTrack! Less well known is that he served 24 years on the SOC Library Committee, contributing greatly to the running of the library and archive and to the organisation of its collections. In 2020, having just completed a huge and valuable task sorting material that had been brought many years before from Regent Terrace, he decided the time had come to step down. At a Zoom committee meeting in October, we wished him well for the future and thanked him for everything he had done. During this part of the online meeting, local branch member Gillian Strugnell appeared at his door to present him with a bottle on behalf of the committee. He (and wife Jean's shortbread) will be greatly missed at Waterston House.

Plate 41. Norman Elkins, recently retired from the SOC Library Committee after 24 years. © *G. Strugnell*

Alan Knox, Chairman, Library Committee

Norman's Nestbox

Norman Elkins celebrated his 80th birthday in early January and, as a gift from his family, a generous donation was made to Waterston House, which was used to purchase a high spec IP Camera Bird Box System from Gardennature - a nod to Norman's lifetime spent observing and recording birds. Staff are grateful to Norman and his family for facilitating this enhancement to HQ's visitor experience.

Gerda Scott

Gerda Scott passed away on 9 December 2020 after a long illness. Gerda was a long-serving member of SOC Ayrshire Branch and indoor meetings, when they restart, will not be the same without her selling raffle tickets at the door. Many members and friends in Ayrshire and beyond will have fond memories of enjoying field trips, some very far-flung, organised by Tony and Gerda.

Gerda will be remembered warmly for her assiduous attention to the smooth running of Club indoor meetings and outings over the decades and for her generous spirit.

OBITUARIES

Sandy Gordon (1931–2020)

Sandy Gordon was a self-confessed 'maverick whisky maker' who played an important part in the development of the world market for single malts and the famous Glenfiddich brand in its distinctive triangular bottle. However, he was as comfortable in an anorak on the Scottish hills as in a blazer in the boardroom.

Whenever he could, he would be birdwatching. While at Ardvreck School he could provide a detailed description of every bird he had seen and his letters home invariably mentioned birds. 'On Friday, we had a very good lecture by Captain Knight who had brought Mr Bamshaw, his golden eagle, with him and it flew round the Crabbie Hill' At Rugby, his next school, he was described as 'a boy of quite exceptionally high intelligence with special ability in mathematics'. It was not surprising that he graduated with a double first in maths and law at Queens College, Cambridge. His national service was spent in the Royal Artillery, and he was swithering between aircraft engineering design and law when his father was diagnosed with inoperable bowel cancer. This led to him becoming heavily involved in the family whisky firm, William Grant & Sons, where he rose to become Chairman, always with an eye for innovation such as the opening of the first ever visitor centre at a distillery at Glenfiddich in 1969. The work of Sandy and his brother, Charles, led to Glenfiddich becoming the world's biggest selling malt and Grant's the fifth largest blended whisky, leading to the company and Sandy personally becoming philanthropists.

He married Linda Stobart, a secretary, in 1955 and they honeymooned in Majorca in a hotel adjacent to a sewerage works from where Sandy was able to pursue his passion for bird watching. Linda related that Sandy took her to a wood in Surrey for the dawn chorus where she had to identify the calls of fifty birds before he would propose to her.

His work allowed him to watch birds throughout the world and in retirement he enjoyed trips to the Faroes, Macquarie island, India and Ethiopia among others. Latterly he regretted that he was having to wind down his birding trips abroad, and as he was no longer seeing nearly as many of the smaller birds he would now concentrate on seeing all the world's raptors!

Plate 42. Sandy Gordon at a Golden Eagle eyrie, Knapdale, Argyll, July 1965. It contained two smashed eggs, which given the accessibility of the nest, led to the presumption that they had been destroyed by humans, possibly the local shepherd. © *David Merrie*

David Merrie recalls meeting Sandy for the first time in a shabby mackintosh, flat cap and wellingtons on the foreshore at Cardross. Binoculars provided the introduction. They struck up a birdwatching partnership looking for geese in winter and eagles in summer. At the end of a day's outing, they would return to a dram of Glenfiddich followed by a delicious meal cooked by Linda. Cognisant of the fact that his father's early demise was probably a side-effect of his profession, after he and Linda got jaundice he never drank alcohol again.

David and he took over the work initiated by Charlie Palmar of monitoring Golden Eagles in mainland Argyll, south of Loch Etive. Latterly they were joined by Mike Gregory who accompanied Sandy for many decades. At the time this huge area had over 30 home ranges spread from the Mull of Kintyre to Oban and Glen Falloch. Sandy continued to monitor this last site into the 1990s and was one of the founding members of the Argyll Raptor Study Group. Their pioneering work noted the decline in eagles in Kintyre following blanket afforestation in the 1960s (this population decline has subsequently been reversed (*SB* 39: 195–199)) and also re-found Chough on the Mull of Kintyre in 1963. His pursuit of Golden Eagles led on to the ascent of all the Scottish Munros. Sandy believed birdwatchers only really wanted to see birds of prey, waterfowl and waders. He devised a points system awarding points to species in order of interest; for example a Golden Eagle was ten, a Hen Harrier six and on down to Mallard at one. Fifty points was a good day!

Sandy, along with Linda, sang with the Greenock Philharmonic Society and he had keen interests in piping (establishing the Glenfiddich Piping Championship), the Gordon Highlanders' Museum in Aberdeen, the Museum of Flight and Scottish Seabird Centre in East Lothian. As a Trustee of the National Museum for Scotland, he was assigned to the Natural Sciences department and took a great interest in its work. In 1999 a skeleton of a fossil sabretooth, *Hoplophoneus primaevus*, came up at auction in San Francisco and the museum's purchase grant was running a bit low. Without his help in providing a bridging loan at short notice the museum would never have acquired this wonderful specimen. He had an honorary degree from St Andrews University and was made a CBE in 1988.

Linda pre-deceased Sandy in late 2019. Our condolences go to their four children: Maggie, Bill, Peter and Sally and nine grandchildren.

David Merrie, Mike Gregory, David Jardine & others

For when it's safe to travel again...

The SOC Library has a very large collection of 'Where to Watch' and bird identification 'Field' guides covering the Arctic to the Antarctica and all the countries in between. Members borrowing field guides from our library can now take them overseas. We also regularly have 'Where to Watch' guides in our second-hand book shop at Waterston House, so please get in touch if you'd like us to check there for you.

For further information contact the SOC Librarian:
Email: Library@the-soc.org.uk

Plate 43. Jenny Bhatia with grandson Cozmo feeding the ducks, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 3 February 2018. © *Zul Bhatia*

Birds in Lochwinnoch during Lockdown 2020

Introduction

During the first part of the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, being unable to drive anywhere, I did a lot of bird watching in Renfrewshire, in and around my home village of Lochwinnoch on the banks of Castle Semple Loch and the River Calder. The village is about 20 miles south-west of Glasgow and ten miles from the coast. I was so pleasantly surprised by the number and variety of birds in the village that I decided to try and quantify them. I recruited a few volunteers to assist me. Although we recorded all birds we saw or heard, we concentrated on finding evidence of breeding. A full-scale breeding survey would have required detailed maps of the village (which we didn't have), much more planning, starting earlier in the year, involving more observers, more visits to all areas, etc. Permission would have had to be sought from many householders with larger properties too.

Methods

We walked every public road in the village at least once between 9–27 May, recording what we saw and, more importantly, what we heard singing. The fine spring weather helped, of course. Visits were mostly in the very early morning. These records were topped up by what we ourselves saw or heard in the village from 1 April to 31 July and, importantly, what other people reported to me. I let people know that the survey was happening mainly via the village Facebook page (Lochwinnoch Community Chat), and regularly asked there for records of particular species. I also contacted people who I knew were interested in birds. The villagers could have reacted adversely to us wandering about the village in the very early morning with a pair of binoculars, but we had no problems. Often people stopped to tell us about what wildlife they had seen, and at least 75 people

shared breeding season records with me. Without their contributions, our understanding of the birdlife of Lochwinnoch would be so much poorer. Unfortunately, not all the records I received could be used here, since some were from outwith the survey area and others were outside the survey period.

Survey area

The area surveyed is outlined on the map. It was quite difficult to decide exactly where to draw the survey boundaries. Many outlying properties rightly consider themselves to be part of Lochwinnoch and sent me many good bird records. In the end, I decided to confine the main survey to the built-up areas at the heart of the village. It can be seen from the map that some significant green spaces have also been included, notably at the west end. This was to take in some of the immediately outlying houses away from the heart of the village. We didn't linger long at those green spaces, so they were only lightly covered by the survey. Most of the survey area is built up, albeit with a good variety of trees and shrubs. Additional habitats within the survey area include some woodland, scrub, grassland (rough and improved), fringing marsh, swamp and fen (adjacent to the Semple Trail), open water (at Castle Semple Loch) and the mainly fast-flowing River Calder. Only the edges of these additional habitats (where they abutted public roads and paths) were surveyed, and then only from those roads and paths. As this was a survey of Lochwinnoch village, areas of the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park and the RSPB Lochwinnoch Reserve were excluded.

Plate 44. Lochwinnoch Village from Golf Course, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 26 August 2007. © *Zul Bhatia*

Plate 45. Lochwinnoch Village from Crawfurds View, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 27 May 2007. © *Zul Bhatia*

Figure 1. Map of Lochwinnoch showing the survey area.

Plate 46. Chaffinch, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 25 March 2007. © *Zul Bhatia*

Results

Well over 2,000 records were contributed by over 75 observers for the period April to July. My own records constitute about 80% of the records. All bird records received (whether within our defined survey area or not) were submitted to the SOC database of birds recorded in the Clyde area. There is probably a significant bias in the records collected towards the central part of the village where several of the most active observers live. Another very obvious source of bias is not receiving information from people who didn't see my requests for information on Facebook. As we didn't access private properties, many birds will have been missed, especially from large gardens, back gardens, properties bordering onto wild areas, etc. Due to time constraints, no special effort was put in to try and prove breeding for secretive species, such as Buzzard and Sparrowhawk which almost certainly bred in the survey area. With this limited survey, little information on breeding success or productivity was possible. Even with incomplete data, however, much useful information has been gained and the following table summarises what we found. These figures should be seen as minimum numbers of pairs/territories for most species. Fifty-one species were confirmed breeding in the survey area with two others probably breeding. Thirty-two other non-breeding species were also recorded in the survey area during the same period. On walks out of the village when driving was banned, a further 17 species were added to the 'Lockdown list' making a total of 102 species: a very respectable number for an inland site.

Plate 47. Male Blackcap, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 3 May 2017. © *Zul Bhatia*

A full systematic list with species accounts has been produced with a summary given here. The most numerous breeding species in the survey area were Rook (68 pairs), Blackbird (50), Starling (40), House Sparrow (40) and Chaffinch (28). The table below lists all species recorded breeding in 2020. Notable amongst those was the small heronry, seven

species of warbler with Blackcap the most numerous (25 territories), Tawny Owl, Swift, Nuthatch, and more Bullfinch territories than I would have expected. The Nuthatches are particularly interesting as they were only first noted breeding in Lochwinnoch in 2015. Apart from the four Nuthatch territories estimated in the survey area, there were also reports of birds in eight other places within a mile of the village. The stretch of the River Calder through the village provided breeding records of Goosander, Dipper and Grey Wagtail. A pair of Barn Owls nested just inside the survey area and fledged five young. This was a very good brood size and probably related to it apparently being a very good 'vole year'.

Plate 48. Barn Owl, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 30 June 2020. © *Zul Bhatia*

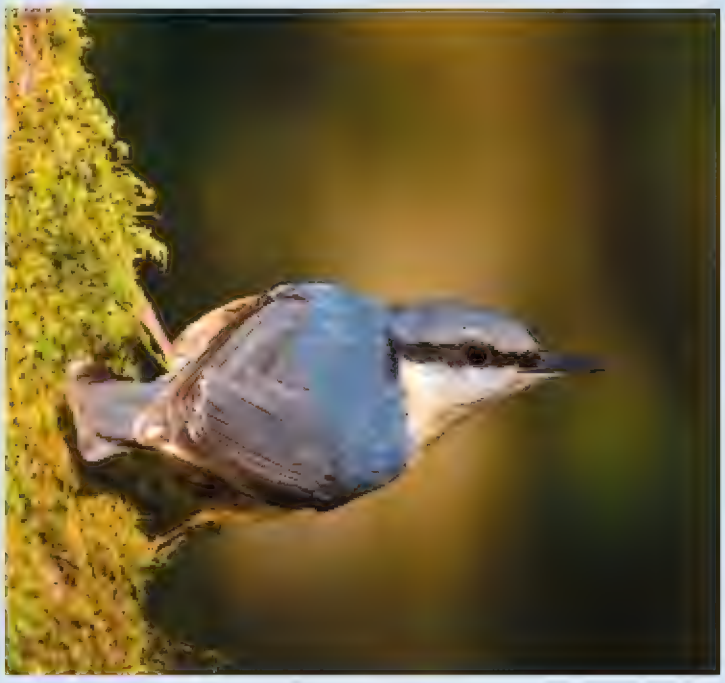

Plate 49. Nuthatch, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 3 May 2017. © *Zul Bhatia*

Plate 50. Swallow chicks about to fledge, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 7 June 2020. © *Zul Bhatia*

Plate 51. Dipper, River Calder, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 20 April 2008. © *Zul Bhatia*

Plate 52. Grey Wagtail, River Calder, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 25 May 2008. © *Zul Bhatia*

Table 1. Summary of breeding birds of Lochwinnoch village, April–July 2020.

Species	Pairs	Species	Pairs	Species	Pairs
Grey Heron	5	Pied Wagtail	2	Blue Tit	24
Greylag Goose	2	Wren	25	Great Tit	18
Mallard	3	Dunnock	18	Nuthatch	4
Goosander	2	Robin	16	Treecreeper	1
Moorhen	1	Blackbird	50	Magpie	7
Stock Dove	1	Song Thrush	23	Jackdaw	25
Woodpigeon	20	Mistle Thrush	4	Rook	68
Collared Dove	25	Grasshopper Warbler	1	Carrion Crow	8
Feral Pigeon	1–5	Sedge Warbler	7	Starling	40
Barn Owl	1	Whitethroat	3	House Sparrow	40
Tawny Owl	4	Garden Warbler	1	Chaffinch	28
Swift	6	Blackcap	25	Greenfinch	5
Great Spotted Woodpecker	8	Chiffchaff	12	Goldfinch	12
Swallow	2	Willow Warbler	17	Siskin	2
House Martin	3	Goldcrest	8	Lesser Redpoll	1
Dipper	2	Long-tailed Tit	3	Bullfinch	10
Grey Wagtail	3	Coal Tit	10	Reed Bunting	2

Notable amongst the non-breeding birds recorded in the survey area were Shelduck, Osprey, Peregrine, Black-tailed Godwit, Cuckoo (normally rare in the village proper, although numerous in the surrounding hills) and Kingfisher. The following six species were not seen but were recorded flying over the village at night: Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Whimbrel, Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper and Arctic Tern.

Plate 53. Sarah Gordon carrying out a bird survey, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 3 May 2011. © *Zul Bhatia*

Acknowledgements

The following people helped with surveying some of the streets in the village: Don Allan, Miriam Lord, Diane Lyons, Laura Parsons, Liz Parsons and Dan Snowdon. Dan brought an extra element to the survey by capturing the flight calls of birds migrating over Lochwinnoch village at night. To them all, I owe particular thanks. A big thank you for this additional information for the breeding survey to Diana Adam, Don Allan, Julie Anderson, Mark Bailey, Steve Banks, Elise Barr, Victoria Bell, Jenny Bhatia, Marc Blane, Jey Burrows, Alison Campbell, Mair Christie, Penny Cole, Carol Colquhoun, Robert Conn, Lyndsay Cowgill, John Delaney, Rosemarie Delaney, Nicola Docherty, Morag Donaldson, Shirley Douglas, Les Duncan, Ronnie Edgar, Gary Fawcett, Heather Fawcett, Eve Ferguson, D Frazer, Gaynor Gallagher, Carol Gemmel, Margaret Gilmour, Margaret Gorman, Joe Greenlees, Billy Hampson, Judith Hutchinson, Davy Hutton, Margaret Jarvis, Michael Jarvis, Gayle Johnston, Joanne Kelly, John Kelly, Celia Kennedy, Fraser Kennedy, Susan Kennedy, Naveed Khan, Deborah Kilgour, David Lindsay, Miriam Lord, Diane Lyons, Johnny Mair, Karen Malcolm, Jamie Manners, Scott Maxwell, David McFall, Sandy McIntyre, Dave Mellor, Shelley Mellor, Ewan Mulhern, Angus Murray, Memoona Murray, Kasia Nairne, Laura Parsons, Liz Parsons, Alec Patten, Joseph Pieraccini, Jo Pinder, Ben Richardson, Karen Rigby, Nell Ross, Fiona Russell, Fran Schopler, Laura Sim, Dan Snowdon, Laurel Stevens, Paul Stewart, Sabita Stewart, Fiona Sutherland, Robyn Watson, Liz Webber, Jim Weir, Mark Wickson and Gregor Young. Don Allan, Jenny Bhatia, Liz Parsons, Val Wilson and Alan Wood commented on a draft of this document.

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Plate 54. Some very small patches of reed survived, 28 April 2020. © *Joyce Moyes*

Disastrous Tay Reedbeds fire, 27 April 2020

The Tay Reedbeds, which stretch along the banks of the Inner Tay Estuary, form the largest area of continuous reedbeds in the UK. Almost all of the reed is along the north bank, with two small areas on the south bank and also on two islands. The total area of reed in the early 1990s was calculated at 410 hectares, but the reed is slowly spreading outwards and now covers an even larger area. The Tay Reedbeds form an important breeding area for birds, with Bearded Tit, Marsh Harrier and Water Rail being of particular interest. Large numbers of Sedge Warblers and an increasing number of Reed Warblers breed every year. The area is also important for migrating hirundines which roost in their tens of thousands. During autumn and early winter, the area attracts a large number of Reed Buntings and numerous tit flocks.

On 27 April 2020, the Tay Reedbeds were devastated by a huge fire which burned out of control along the north bank despite the efforts of the Scottish Fire and Rescue service. Eventually, the fire was stopped at Port Allen with the help of a firefighting helicopter. By the time the fire was finally stopped, around 110 hectares, around 25% of the entire reedbed, had been totally lost. This affected approximately 50% of the best breeding areas in the reedbeds.

Plate 55. A view from the outer edge. The author looks back towards the bank, 28 April 2020. © *Joyce Moyes*

Plate 56. Marsh Harrier, tagged brood, 25 June 2016. © *Joyce Moyes*

During a visit the following day, we were pleased to see that at least some of the Bearded Tit pairs had managed to fledge their first broods prior to the fire, and family parties could be seen foraging in the burned areas. Many others would have still been feeding

Plate 57. Male Bearded Tit foraging the day after the fire, 28 April 2020. © *Joyce Moyes*

chicks in the nest, however, and these will have perished. At least two Marsh Harrier nests were destroyed, and it is unlikely that the pairs were able to make another attempt. At this time, most Water Rails are incubating, so every nest will have been destroyed. The burned area was prime Water Rail habitat, and it is likely that up to 50 nests were lost.

Over the years there have been a number of fires in the reeds, and every one was started either deliberately, or accidentally as the result of 'controlled' burning. No cause for this fire has been identified, and while it cannot be proved that it was started deliberately, I cannot think of any other reason for this fire starting.

Of course the reed recovered very quickly. Within just eight weeks, the regenerating reeds were over 2.5 metres high, although not as tall as the unburned reed, which can reach over 3.5 metres. Migratory warblers and hirundines were present in their usual large numbers from late June onwards, and amazingly, one would never know visually that this huge area had been recently burned.

Plate 58. A view from the outer edge, looking towards the bank, 28 April 2020. © *Joyce Moyes*

Plate 59. A view over the burnt reedbed looking west, 28 April 2020. © *Joyce Moyes*

Long-term, the damage done is negligible, the reeds will recover fully in 2021, and the only lasting damage is to a number of trees which have invaded the few drier areas of reed. In some ways the birds will actually benefit from the fire, since areas of poor reed often fall over, preventing birds from breeding. All the reed will be of the same age in 2021, and I anticipate that there will be record numbers of Water Rail in the burned areas, although they will decrease in future years as reed begins to fall over again.

Fire can be a useful management tool, although not on this scale, and I hope I never see such devastation again. The best means of preventing such large fires in the future is management of the reeds by creating firebreaks, but this is costly. In the current financial climate, large-scale management seems a long way off, and I fear for the area in the future.

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Plate 60. Recovering reeds, 10 July 2020. © *Joyce Moyes*

BOOK REVIEWS

Reviews published here reflect the views of the named reviewers and not those of the SOC.

Fragile: birds, eggs and habitats. Colin Prior, 2020. Merrell, London, ISBN 978-1-8589-4688-7, hardback, 240 pages, colour photos, £40.00.

Opening this book for the first time, I was immediately impressed by the stunning photographs of both eggshells and landscapes. Colin's skill as a photographer, particularly of landscapes, is very well known, but matching eggs of typical species of birds with these habitats is both new and innovative.

The idea for this book had been in Colin's mind for more than ten years, but he knew that the expense of buying the specialist equipment for photographing eggs was more than he could justify. Step forward a fellow Scot, Derek Rattray, who luckily had the required kit, and so the project was back on. To examine a large range of birds' eggs, Colin then turned to the leading authority in Scotland, Bob McGowan, of the National Museums Scotland in Edinburgh. Bob was able to show Colin the best specimens in the museum's huge egg collection, enabling him to make a match with his eight chosen habitats. The process involved in photographing more than 300 eggs to the high standard Colin demanded, using sophisticated digital techniques, was very time consuming. However, the astonishing, almost three-dimensional results have been well worth the effort.

In addition to Colin's inspiring photographs and their presentation, there are two very instructive essays, one by Bob on the value of museum egg collections, and the other by Professor Des Thompson. One of Scotland's leading environmentalists and ecologists, Des reflects on the state of nature and the threats to habitats and biodiversity. Here, unfortunately, the picture is far from rosy.

This impressive book will be enjoyed both by photographers and birders alike.

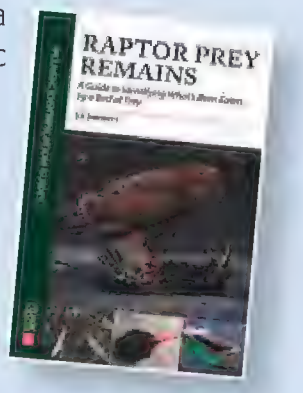
David Clugston

If Rivers Could Sing - a Scottish river wildlife journey. Keith Broomfield, 2020. Tippermuir Books Ltd, Perth. ISBN 978-1-913836-00-9, paperback, 165 pages, B/W drawings. £9.99.

A very personal account is presented in 24 short chapters of a year in the life of the River Devon's 33-mile progress through Perth, Kinross and Clackmannan. Each chapter has a theme as well as being linked to specific months e.g. Hill Burns and... the Source (June–September) or In Search of Ratty (Water Voles) (February). A wide variety of wildlife is mentioned in an informed way, ranging from freshwater invertebrates to riverside trees. There is no colour within the pages, but many nice little drawings by Rob Hands (a retired Principal Teacher of Geography). This has helped keep the price under £10, albeit by one penny! The author's affection for his subject comes over in the writing which demonstrates the satisfaction that comes from getting to know a habitat by frequent visits throughout the year. This an enjoyable read which should encourage others to get to know their local patch in detail.

Stan da Prato

Raptor Prey Remains: a guide to identifying what's been eaten by a bird of prey. Ed Drewitt, 2020. Pelagic Publishing, ISBN 978-1-78427-207-4, paperback, 230 pages, colour photos, £24.99.



This is a photographic identification guide to the feathers and body parts left after a species has been eaten or cached by a British bird of prey. The remains of about 100 bird species and some mammal prey are featured. The photos are good and helpful, although the feathers are not arranged in a comprehensive or standardised way, which makes comparisons difficult. This guide would certainly have helped me when I was first learning common kills while studying raptor predation for my PhD, but it wouldn't have helped when the remains belonged to something out of the ordinary such as a Little Auk, a Long-eared Owl, a Purple Sandpiper or even a Tree Sparrow. The guide (also available in hardback and as an ebook) is expensive, considering it is missing most UK species, and also

missing many of the feathers you might need to help identify those birds it does include. It should please any aspiring nature detective, and there is a certain gory fascination here for any birder. However, I will stick with the slightly cheaper and more useful Helm Identification Guide (2nd edition paperback), *Tracks & Signs of the Birds of Britain & Europe* by Brown, Ferguson, Lawrence & Lees (ISBN-13 9780713653823).

Will Cresswell

The Ring Ouzel: a view from the North York Moors. Vic Fairbrother & Ken Hutchinson (authors), Jonathon Pomroy (illustrator), 2020. Whittles Publishing, ISBN-13: 978-1849954587, paperback, 272 pages, 15 colour plates, 35 illustrations and colour maps and tables, £21.95.

This book provides a fascinating insight into the life of the Ring Ouzel in one of its last remaining strongholds in the UK, the North York Moors. Both authors are retired enthusiasts who have been studying the species in this area for the last 20 or so years. The first chapters deal with identification, distribution, and status, and give brief summaries of other local studies in the UK before going on to describe the North York Moors study area and Ring Ouzel breeding biology. Chapters 14–19 deal with calls and song, migration, population estimates, human impact, other species encountered on the moors and the work of the Ring Ouzel Study Group. Neither author is a professional ornithologist, but this book is a fitting testament to what can be achieved by skilled and determined amateur birders with enquiring minds and long hours in the field. The text, illustrated throughout with photographs and watercolours, is full of extracts from their extensive field notes, which is a great way of transporting the reader onto the moors and experiencing the highs and lows of fieldwork in this demanding environment. The book has three pages of references and expands our knowledge of this poorly understood and difficult-to-study species. I thoroughly recommend it to all interested in our uplands and the species which live in these special places.

Innes Sim

New Books also received in the George Waterston Library

All the Birds of the World. Josep del Hoyo, 2020. Lynx Edicions, ISBN 978-84-16728-37-4, hardback, 967 pages, €85.00.

Birds of Argentina and the Southwest Atlantic. Mark Pearman & Juan I. Areta, 2020. Helm, Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-0-7136-4579-8, paperback, 480 pages, £39.99.

Birds of East Africa (2nd edition). Terry Stevenson & John Fanshawe, 2020. Helm, Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4081-5736-7, paperback, 640 pages, £34.99.

Curious About Nature. A Passion for Fieldwork. Tim Burt & Des Thompson (eds.), 2020. Cambridge University Press, ISBN 978-1-108-44864-2, paperback, 391 pages, £29.99.

Nestboxes: Your Complete Guide. David Cromack, 2020. British Trust for Ornithology, ISBN 978-1-908581-84-6, paperback, 162 pages, £10.95.

What Is a Bird? An Exploration of Anatomy, Physiology, Behavior, and Ecology. Tony D. Williams (ed.), 2020. Princeton University Press, ISBN 978-0-691-20016-3, hardback, 368 pages, £30.00.

Where to Watch Birds in East Anglia. David Callahan, 2020. Helm, Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-6222-5, paperback, 366 pages, £24.99.

SOC Members can borrow new books by emailing the Librarian (Library@the-soc.org.uk). Whilst the Library itself currently remains closed, books can either be collected from Waterston House during opening hours or can be posted out (UK only, conditions and p&p charges apply).

RINGERS' ROUNDUP

This edition of Ringers' Roundup gives a flavour of some activities of the Tay Ringing Group (Tayside, Fife and Central regions) including updates on a number of our projects reported in **Scottish Birds** *38:3 (September 2018).*

As for other survey work, ringing was constrained in the early part of the season due to COVID-19 related restrictions on travel and working with other surveyors. Despite the difficulties of working from home the BTO staff, both nationally and in Scotland, worked hard to keep ringers and fieldworkers up to date with the daily rollercoaster of often divergent country (and sometimes regional) government guidance. In addition, the BTO ringing team, aware that so many folk would be stuck in their gardens, developed various ringing schemes, most notably the garden Constant Effort Site (CES), to add value to that activity. The concentration of ringing in gardens at local level gave some interesting results, with Herring Gulls caught in a garden at Broughty Ferry, and Nuthatch and high numbers of Blackcap at Balmerino that might otherwise have been unnoticed. A number of members participated in the BTO Garden CES project. This is the first year that CES has been extended to garden ringing and it will be interesting to see the results and the ideas that BTO develop from it.

Thankfully, the summer allowed individual projects to get underway and the group was able to contribute at least partial data for a number of CES and Retrapping Adults for Survival to BTO. Sadly, however, the restrictions on social distancing heavily impacted the training and progression of ringers, and getting trainees out again will be one of the things we most look forward to in 2021.

Starlings, impact of COVID-19 on sightings
- Ben Herschell

Early indications are that in 2020 the rate of resighting of a long-term colour-ringed population of Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* increased. These sightings are affected by various factors including the number of birds ringed in any year. Birds are not only sighted mainly in the year of ringing, but also in the two years after, with fewer sightings in subsequent years. I reviewed ten years of data, in two distinct datasets.

The first was the number of individual sightings from the main 'starrie' spotter, who records 99% of my sightings within Montrose. These sightings are essentially constant effort, and in 2020 there was no significant change in reporting rates in relation to birds ringed.

The second dataset used sightings reported more than 20 km from Montrose. These included Skirza near Wick to the north, Cambridgeshire to the south, and Antrim in N. Ireland to the west. The 20 km dataset allowed the exclusion of the thousands of Montrose and local countryside records.

In the years 2011 to 2019 the average number of sightings within this second set of data was just over five per year. The position changed dramatically in 2020, however, with the number sighted at 20. Many of the observers mentioned 'when working from home' or words to that effect and I am confident that this had a direct positive effect on the number of sightings received.

The Facinating life of an Osprey
- Keith Brockie

Colour-ringing has provided a huge amount of information regarding the lives of Ospreys. With nest cams, high powered optics and cameras birds can be identified and followed from their wintering areas, migration routes and at their nest sites.

A good example is a female Osprey, blue Y6, breeding for the first time with an unringed male at an oak tree eyrie near Aberfeldy, Perthshire in 2020. Y6 fledged from a brood of three ringed on the 6 July 2016 at Forestry England nest platform 2 in the Kielder Forest.

Her parents were both ringed as well, the male, yellow 37, was ringed as a chick in 2005 at Glaslyn in Wales. The female, white EB, was ringed in the Tweed Valley in 2007. 2016 was the first time EB and 37 had bred together after a brief liaison in 2014. Y6 has also been recorded wintering at Tanji Marsh on the Gambian Coast, Africa, from November 2017 onwards. Previously, in Scotland Y6 was spotted intruding briefly at the SWT Loch of Lowes nest on the 15 May 2019 and 7 April 2020.

Plate 61. Colour-ringed Osprey (blue Y6) near Aberfeldy, 21 July 2020. © *Keith Brockie*

Little Ringed Plover, opportunistic nomads

- Chris McGuigan & Mark Wilkinson

In early August 2020, I saw Mark Wilkinson's photos on Twitter which seemed to show breeding inland Lothian Little Ringed Plover (LRP). I have been following the fortunes of this species in Angus and adjacent areas of eastern Scotland - ringing them since 2006 and colour-ringing adults since 2016.

This year, COVID-19 travel restrictions meant I missed most of the breeding season so Mark's record afforded a late-2020 observation opportunity. Mark had first seen a pair plus a single male on 25 July. Returning on 7 August, the 'pair' seemed to have moved on but the male now had two small pulli in tow! This was only the third ever LRP record for this site, and the first breeding record. A pair of Ringed Plovers also bred alongside the LRP's and was the first breeding record there for at least 25 years. (They fledged a brood of three). This may have been due to abnormally low water levels after the very dry spring.

Plate 62. Little Ringed Plover at a site in Lothian, 25 July 2020. © *Mark Wilkinson*

On 13 August, the male could not be found but a colour-ringed female was guarding two pulli. The same three birds were present on 15 and 24 August, by which time the pulli were at fledging stage. None were present on the final visit (12 September), by which time water levels had risen markedly.

The female was originally ringed by me as an adult on 20 May 2018, at a well-watched Angus site where she bred successfully. She was last seen there on 21 June and then at Keyhaven, Hampshire on 20 July 2018.

She then moved to a second Angus site, breeding successfully between 15 April and 1 July 2019. Luckily, a collaborating LRP fanatic lives near site 2 and reported she was present there from 12 April to 19 May 2020.

She may have either failed at Angus site 2 or found it 'full' (two pairs bred successfully there this year). Either way, she relocated south to Lothian for a late (or second) but successful breeding attempt. This bird thus provides a nice link between Angus and Lothian and a demonstration of how opportunistic these birds are in seeking out and exploiting new, often short-lived, potential breeding sites.

Water Rail in the Tay Reedbeds
- Derek Robertson

Eight geolocators were deployed on female Water Rails in the Tay Reedbeds in the spring of 2018. As expected, two birds were recaptured the following year. Unfortunately, one of the geolocators had fallen off. An analysis of the data from the recovered device by Rob Patchett showed that the bird had spent the winter in the south of Ireland, leaving the Tay on 29 September and arriving in its winter quarters on 1 October. It departed there on 20 March 2019, arriving back on the Tay on 23rd March, just a couple of days before it was recaptured. This suggests that the birds which do migrate leave very soon after moulting and return about 2–3 weeks before they begin to lay eggs.

Eight geolocators were deployed in spring 2019 but lockdown in spring 2020 prevented recovering any of these. Four further geolocators were deployed in 2020 before lockdown started. As well as discovering where these birds spend the winter, the study may allow us to shed light on timing of migration, moult and nesting. The project has been partly supported by a small grant award from the SOC.

Feather samples of wintering birds will be taken in 2020–21 in collaboration with Glasgow University to see if stable isotope analysis can shed some light on the origin of the water rails using the Tay Reedbeds in winter.

Fife Ness Ringing Station - *Les Hatton*

The Patch at Fife Ness has long been known as one of Fife's top birdwatching sites. It not only has a long list of rarities, but it also provides a refuge for large numbers of passage thrushes and common migrants.

The Patch owes it origins to the single-minded determination of Jim Cobb to grow trees where many experts told him they would never grow. Over the years Jim has proven them all wrong and now the Patch holds an eclectic range of trees and shrubs. Jim worked closely with the Crail Golf Club and much of the best bird and ringing sites are on the "triangle", land owned by the golf club and planted up by Jim in collaboration with them. Jim gifted the site to the Scottish Wildlife Trust and it forms part of their chain of coastal reserves in Fife, lying close to Kilminning.

Jim is no longer able to keep the ringing station going and in 2020 a group of ringers drawn from Tay Ringing Group and long-time stalwarts of the Patch such as Mark Oksien and Chris Broome, formed a Fife Ness Ringing Group to carry on Jim's good work. Despite COVID-19 and difficult weather conditions the site provided some good birds in 2020, including Arctic and Greenish Warblers.

Any ringing session at the Patch is always enlivened by a constant stream of birdwatchers, many of whom have a long history and deep knowledge of the site, and the intention of the ringing group is to work closely with birdwatchers, the SWT and the golf club to manage the site for birds. Some limited experimental cutting has been undertaken to gauge how well the habitat will respond to management in such a challenging environment. Early indications are that Jim's careful planting is now robust and well adapted, and that further habitat management to create a more diverse and open structure should be possible.

Tracking Short-eared Owls
- John Calladine

The programme of satellite tracking Short-eared Owls that started in 2017 (see *Scottish Birds* 38, 3 page 262) achieved its target sample of over 20 tagged birds in late summer 2020. While the principal objective of this study is to understand their habitat requirements, their wider movements continue to surprise.

Among the last cohort of birds to be tagged, were the first three juveniles to be tracked, all in Perthshire. All three initially moved to higher elevations in the Cairngorms. From there, one moved south to the Peak District only to return to the Cairngorms in early October. It then headed south again, this time as far as Cornwall before returning north through Wales and across to Ireland with the latest signals coming from the north coast of County Antrim.

Another of the three headed east from the Cairngorms, crossing the North Sea to make landfall in Denmark. It then continued through

Plate 63. A tagged Short-eared Owl that went to Libya, 16 September 2020. © *Neil Morrison*

Figure 1. Movements in July–December 2020 of three juvenile Short-eared Owls tagged in Perthshire.

Sweden and crossed the Baltic to Latvia, travelling through Belarus before turning west through Lithuania and then to the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad where her signal went quiet for a few weeks. She 'reappeared' at the end of October on Corsica, then crossed the Mediterranean to Algeria, continuing south-west through Morocco and into Mauritania where her stationary signal indicates she has died in the desert close to the border with Mali and 640 km east of the 'final resting place' for a tagged bird from Arran at the beginning of the year (see *Scottish Birds* 40, 3 page 269).

The third bird left the Cairngorms to reach the Lincolnshire coast. From there she made an attempt to cross the North Sea but turned back 65 km from the Netherlands coast to return to Yorkshire, just north of Spurn. From there she headed south, crossing the channel just east of Dungeness and continued south through France from where she crossed the Mediterranean, with a one-day stop on Majorca to Algeria. Crossing the Atlas Mountains and continuing south-east through Tunisia and into Libya, we last heard from her in the 'sand-sea' of the Ubari Erg.

An interesting and productive 'by-product' of this tagging programme has been an increased interest in ringing owls caught using audio-lures at night. With ringers across Scotland and more widely in Europe now catching numbers of Barn, Long-eared and Short-eared Owls, we can look forward to interesting recoveries and further insights into the movements of these birds.

Tree Sparrow conundrum - where do they go? - *Barry Caudwell*

A little over ten years ago I began a small nest box project, initially it was only a few boxes in the garden. We now have about 100 nest boxes in the garden and with funding from various grants over 400 boxes spread across sites on the Carse of Gowrie, Perth & Kinross. I have some wonderful help from people in monitoring some of these sites. In 2019 we ringed over 400 Tree Sparrow pulli, and it would be nice to know where they move on to. We retrap some during the immediate post fledging period but not that many, so what happens to the rest? Occasionally, a bird is caught at the nest during nest rounds and these are generally birds ringed as pulli in a previous year. Interestingly, my smallest site has the highest rate of retrap for birds on the nest. Frustratingly, from the whole of the project we have only one garden bird (below) that has been recaptured at a distant site.

TV48170	Juv	21/05/15	Abernyte, Perth
	Ad	04/10/15	Roundyhill, Angus 23km NE
			152 Days

During the period 2004–2016 over 3,500 juvenile and a total of 5,500 Tree Sparrows were ringed by members of Tay Ringing Group.

Table 2. Birds retrapped away from the original ringing site.

T125184	Ad	07/12/2004	Kincraig, Elie, Fife.
	R	27/05/2005	Midtown of Barras Farm, Aberdeenshire. 88 km NNE, 171 days.
TC79403	Juv	26/06/2005	Airlie, Angus.
	X	05/06/2006	near Forfark Angus. 16 km ENE, 344 days.
TX37993	Juv	28/07/2016	Middle Brighty, Murroes, Angus.
	X	29/08/2016	Newbigging, Tealing, Angus. 3 km SW, 32 days.
V569985	Im	20/06/2008	Barry Mill, Mains of Ravensby, Barry, Angus.
	X	09/02/2010	Newbigging, Dundee. 4km WNW, 1 year 234 days.
Z464868	Ad	02/11/2015	Montrose Basin, SWT Wildlife Centre, Angus.
	X	07/06/2016	Rossie Mills, Montrose, Angus. 2 km W, 218 days.
N470643	Ad	25/03/1999	Lathallan Home Farm, Largoward, Fife.
	R	05/12/1999	Langfaulds, Saline, Fife. 46 km SWW, 255 days.

Of all these birds, those found again at a significant distance, are listed above - only two of them were ringed as juveniles.

Beating the COVID-19 blues with Barn Owls - *Mark Wilson*

2020 leaves a lot to be desired, in many respects, but one huge positive for me has been getting involved with owl ringing and monitoring around Flanders Moss, Stirling. At the start of the year, I was poised to take on several nest boxes in this area from Barn Owl legend Mike Steward. In order for me to gain the experience needed to be allowed to monitor and ring this Schedule 1 species, Mike and I had agreed to ring the 2020 broods in these boxes together.

The lockdown in March seemed as if it might have put paid to these plans, but the relaxed restrictions in June allowed me to check boxes within 5 km of the house. High vole numbers and decent spring weather yielded 13 broods from 14 boxes around the Moss.

Plate 64. Barn Owl chicks, Flanders Moss area, 7 June 2020. © *Mark Wilson*

When restrictions for ringing and monitoring were further relaxed, we were able to include several broods in more distant parts of Mike's owl box area. We ringed over 50 Barn Owl nestlings and a couple of adult females.

In order to find out about young birds dispersing from my boxes into the wider countryside, I trained with John Calladine and Neil Morrison, to gain experience of luring adult owls into mist-nets using playback. During two, successful nights we caught 22 owls of three species.

So, 2020 leaves me with lots of good fieldwork memories, a fantastic network of local Barn Owl contacts, and a licence endorsement to ring nestlings and adult owls contributing to the study of these fascinating species - it wasn't all bad!

Glen Clova wader wanderings - *Bruce Lynch*

Scottish Birds 38(3) (2018) described the colour-marking of Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* within Glen Clova, Angus. This article is a brief update of reported sightings.

From 2016 to date a total of 141 large Lapwing chicks have had a yellow plastic flag, with a 2-letter black code (e.g. AA), attached to their right tibia (upper leg) and a red plastic ring as a scheme marker on the left tibia. Reported sightings in the non-breeding season show movements to the north, south and south-west as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Resightings of lapwing chicks ringed in Glen Clova 2016–2020.

Season	Location	Ring Code if known	Comments
Post-breeding (July–mid-October)	Amble, Northumberland	EK	July, 6 weeks after leg flagged
	East Chevington, Northumberland	HN	
Wintering (late October –early February)	Grimethorpe, South Yorkshire	KL	November
	Nigg Bay, Ross & Cromarty	Flag not read	February
	Luthrie, Fife	Flag not read	February
Return to breeding grounds (late February–March)	Belfast Lough, N. Ireland	Flag Not Read	February
	Ythan estuary, Aberdeenshire	LJ	March
	Caerlaverock, Dumfries & Galloway	EK	March

By late February and throughout March, Lapwings return to their breeding grounds in Glen Clova. Two marked Lapwings, KT and the well-travelled EK have been seen back in Glen Clova in subsequent years.

A total of five adult Oystercatchers were colour-ringed during mist netting over temporary pools in February and March since 2014. One adult (CC), caught in late February 2017, remained to breed in the same field that year and every year since.

From 2016 a total of 68 Oystercatcher chicks have had an orange plastic ring over a white coded (e.g. AA) plastic ring put on their left tarsus.

Both adults and first winter Oystercatchers show south westerly movements away from their breeding grounds. Wintering records have included two of the colour-ringed adults;

AC, colour-ringed in 2014 was resighted at Beaumaris, Anglesey in November 2020; and CC, has wintered in the Dublin Bay complex annually since 2017.

Wintering chicks have been recorded from Wigton (CJ) on the Solway Estuary, Grange-over-sands (CX, found dead), Cumbria to Liverpool and Hoylake (LB) and Heysham helipad (AU) at Port of Heysham, near Lancaster, as well as from Flint (AL) north Wales. CN (ringed June 2017) summered between May to July 2018 at Rogerstown Estuary, Rush, Eire.

Exceptions to this south-westerly wintering dispersal were reports of birds between November and February from Westhaven (LB) (2017); Barry Buddon (LB) (2018) on the Outer Tay Estuary; and Torness (HE) and Skateraw (HP) on the outer Firth of Forth. There were August reports of EA on the Forth Estuary, and JT at Redcar, Northumberland.

Please look out for colour-marked Lapwings and Oystercatcher and send reports to Bruce Lynch, Tay Ringing Group. Email: b_lynch1@sky.com

Selected ringing recoveries

Codes: R - retrapped/controlled by a ringer; S - Sight record; X - Dead; 1 - nestling; 3 - first year; 4–8 - full grown/adult.

Grey Heron

1299142	1	28/4/19	Besthope Nature Reserve, Nottinghamshire
	S	29/9/19	Skinflats, Falkirk (154 days, 370 km NNW)

Young grey herons are known to disperse to coastal sites gradually after fledging, this is one of the more extreme examples.

Oystercatcher

5162630	1	07/07/13	Per Olsavick, Troms, Norway
	S	17/8/14	Tayport Bay, Fife
	S	21/01/15	Tayport Common, Fife
	S	25/10/20	Tayport, Fife
FA88336	6	21/8/04	Eden Estuary, Fife
	X	08/07/20	Åsvær, Dønna, Norway (5800 days, 1352 km NE)

Dunlin

BT58206	3	28/09/15	Wigeon Hide Pools, Montrose Basin, Angus
	R	14/07/20	Ottenby, Öland, Sweden (1751 days, 1162 km E)

Mediterranean Gull

5X0092	7	17/5/15	Antwerpen, Belgium
	S	28/8/19	East Wemyss, Fife (1564 days, 733 km NW)

Mediterranean Gull (continued)

FS17886	8	15/5/16	Rz. Odra, Bielinek, Cedynia, Zachodniopomorskie, Poland
	S	28/8/18	East Wemyss, Fife (830 days, 1164 km WNW)
E940758	8	20/05/18	Kallo, Oost-Vlaanderen, Belgium
	S	12/08/19	Redcastle, Lunan Bay, Angus (449 days, 744 km NW)
IA177940	1	15/06/18	Kiesgrube Lobnitz Gravel Pit, Leipzig, Germany
	S	22/07/20	Arbroath Harbour, Angus (768 days, 1125 km WNW)

A sample of records for this now commonly observed wee gull.

Lesser Black-backed Gull

GR50912	1	08/07/13	St Serfs Island, Loch Leven, Perth & Kinross
	S	11/02/20	El Jadida, Morocco (2409 days, 2577 km S)

Pied Wagtail

Z553743	6	05/05/16	Gallagher Retail Park, Dundee
	X	25/12/19	Baron sur Odon, Calvados, France (599 days, 835 km S)

First seen at this location in Normandy in January 2017 it was clearly happier there, being sighted regularly until found dead with large engorged tick on its head.

AVJ3081	4M	10/11/19	Otter, Budleigh Salterton, Devon
	S	13/04/20	River Eden near Dairsie, Fife (155 days, 632 km N)

Constrained to local walks during lockdown gave plenty opportunity to eventually see the full ring number. Seen at the same location through April and May but no definite evidence of breeding.

Sedge Warbler

ALB1641	3	31/07/20	Powgavie, Perth & Kinross
	R	17/08/20	Ansot, Pyrénées-Atlantiques, France (17 days, 1442 km S)

Bearded Tit

S244395	3JM	24/06/18	Taylodge, Perth & Kinross
	R	16/10/18	Slevdalsvannet, Vest-Agder, Norway (114 days, 619 km ENE)
S247167	3JF	04/08/18	Powgavie, Inchture, Perth & Kinross
	R	15/07/20	East Chevington, Northumberland (711 days, 160 km SE)

Many of you will have read reports about the 'irruption' of Bearded Tits from Tay Reedbeds in 2018 with birds turning up at Loch Leven, Isle of May, Aberdeenshire and one making it 619 km to Norway. A surprise in 2020 was to find another bird from the 2018 cohort at a nature reserve in Northumberland, and two other ringed birds known to be present (could they also be from the Tay?).

Blue Tit

ATL5559	3	02/08/20	Abernyte, Perth & Kinross
	R	25/11/20	Peebles, Scottish Borders (115 days, 91 km S)

It is always a surprise when Blue Tits move out of their local area but this is the second TRG 'bluti' in last few years to find its way to the Borders. The other (S621445) moving 75 km from St Andrews Botanic Gardens to Biggar in 2018.

Goldfinch

ATB6582	3	14/12/18	Woodford Halse, Northamptonshire
	R	04/04/20	Alloa, Clackmannanshire (477 days, 472 km NNW)

Plate 65. Pied Wagtail on River Eden, 13 April 2020. © *Shirley Millar*

Plate 66. Booted Warbler, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 28 August 2016. © *Samuel Perfect*

Sykes's Warbler re-Booted

G. WOODBRIDGE & J.M. COLLINSON

An *Iduna* warbler identified as a Sykes's Warbler *Iduna rama* on North Ronaldsay in August 2016 questions in-field and in-the-hand identification of this species from Booted Warbler *Iduna caligata*. The individual was identified as Sykes's Warbler, but trapping yielded dropped feathers which were used to confirm this through DNA analysis. However, this analysis indicated that the individual was instead a Booted Warbler. This bird challenges biometric and plumage features used by field ornithologists to identify these species in the hand or in the field confidently, without the aid of diagnostic breeding features. Here, we present a history of the bird and its identification, the subsequent DNA analysis and discussion on the need for further consideration in correctly identifying this species pairing.

Background

The formal taxonomic split of the Sykes's Warbler from Booted Warbler came in the early 2000s (Knox *et al.* 2002) but had been suggested prior to this (Svensson 2001). Sykes's Warbler was retrospectively added to the British List from prior occurrences, and there have been several subsequent records, however the species remains extremely rare in the UK (see Riddington 2009). Booted Warbler is an Indo-Palearctic migrant and may be found breeding from south-eastern Finland to Kazakhstan and spends the winter in eastern India. Sykes's Warbler breeds in the Middle East to east Central Asia and as far south as the United Arab Emirates and spends the winter on the Indian subcontinent (Shirihai & Svensson 2018). Both are summer migrants and have been described on the breeding grounds, however, more may still be learned from stragglers to the west for identification and taxonomic purposes. There has been some question about the taxonomic affinity of a subspecies population of the group known as '*annectens*' found in south-eastern Kazakhstan. Currently, this population is considered closer to Sykes's Warbler based on breeding phenology (Castell & Kirwan 2005), but this has been challenged, and the population is indeterminate from Booted Warbler based on specimen appearance and biometrics (Svensson 2001). The birds in the extreme north-west of Sykes's Warbler's range, which abuts that of Booted Warbler, have not received detailed study and few specimens have been sourced from there. They seem somewhat darker with a duskier bill, approaching Booted Warbler traits, and need further study to determine their correct species (sub-species?) affiliation (Shirihai & Svensson 2018).

Since the split of the species, two independent biometrics (with tail/wing ratio not being an independent measure) have been required to support positive identification of these species in Britain, with this considered reliable as long as there are no conflicting plumage features normally considered indicative of the contrary species (Riddington 2009).

In the field

On 28 August 2016, Peter Donnelly found an *Iduna* warbler by the croft Senness, North Ronaldsay, Orkney. Skittish and elusive, the bird was initially thought to be a Booted Warbler in the first two hours of field observation. The consensus was that this individual had a small warbler-type jizz, akin to a *Phylloscopus* warbler. Key features noted here included the apparently shortish-looking bill and a hint of a darkish tip to the lower mandible. Despite its strikingly pale colouration, it was thought that this could be explained if the bird was an individual at the extreme end of Booted Warbler plumage variation. With some element of doubt over the identification, the decision was made to make efforts to trap the bird. The bird eventually made its way towards the netting area and was trapped at about 18:00 hrs. After processing, the bird was released back at this site but was not seen subsequently.

In the hand

A full set of biometrics were taken in the hand, with focus on bill-skull measurement, wing length, tail length, first primary length, tail/wing ratio and second primary position as necessary. A few feathers were accidentally dislodged during the process of ringing and were collected for DNA analysis. Now in the hand, the bird appeared relatively long-tailed, long-billed and an overall pale brownish-grey. The lower mandible showed a darkish smudge with pale tip, rather than a discrete dark tip. Recent records of Booted Warbler in 2012 and 2015 on North Ronaldsay seen by the observers had looked distinctly different to this bird, having a more obvious small-warbler type jizz and sandy-brown colouration. The biometric data were analysed to establish whether or not they supported a positive identification as Sykes's Warbler, as were the suite of plumage features. The biometrics are summarised in Table 1.

Unfortunately, many of the biometrics fell in the overlap zone for both species. The wing length fell in the middle of both ranges, though on the upper limit (perhaps suggesting a male). The bill-to-skull measurement fell in the middle of the range for *rama*, but at the upper limit of *caligata* where just 2.7% of individuals measure above

Table 1. The full biometrics of the 2016 Booted Warbler taken by Gavin Woodbridge and independently checked by the NRBO Warden, Alison Duncan; compared to the equivalent measurements quoted in Kennerley & Pearson (2010) and Shirihai & Svensson (2018).

Measurement	North Ronaldsay Booted Warbler 2016	Sykes's Warbler	Booted Warbler
Bill to skull	14.6 mm	13.6–16.8 mm, 7% <14.5	12.0–15.6 mm, rarely >14.5 mm
Wing length	62 mm	57–66 mm	56–65 mm
Tail length	51 mm	46–57 mm	40–51 mm
Tail:wing ratio	82.3	78.1–93.2 (mean 85.6; 3% <81.0)	68.9–82.1 (mean, 77.3; 2% >81.0)
1st primary length (relative to longest primary covert)	6	3.5–10	2–8
2nd primary position	P2=7/8	44%	18%

The bird showed emarginations on the third, fourth and fifth primaries and partially on the sixth primary. Primary tip positions relative to the wing point (P3,4,5) (ss = secondaries):

Primary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10/ss
Distance from longest primary mm	-6	-5	0	0	0	-2.5	-5	-7	-8	-10

14.3 mm. The tail length suggested *rama* with just 3.6% of *caligata* having a tail length >50 mm. The second primary position suggested *rama* but did not rule out *caligata*. The slight emargination on the sixth primary may support *rama* though may be present in *caligata*, where up to 25% can show a partial emargination on the sixth primary. Just 2% of *caligata* have a tail:wing ratio of >81.0 (Svensson 2001). When considered in conjunction with plumage features, the long tail-length, relative second primary position and bill-skull measurement were believed at the time to support an identification of *rama*. Retrospectively, when put through an 'if all else fails' method (Svensson 2003): (tail/2) + (tail/wing ratio) + (bill length*2), the final calculated value equals 137.0. The reference ranges given for *caligata* and *rama* are 126.0–137.0 and 135.2–151.5 respectively, leaving this individual in the overlap zone again, if at the upper limit for Booted Warbler.

Plumage

Key plumage features are summarised in Table 2.

Head and upperparts. The bird was relatively 'plain-faced' and the supercilium extended behind the eye, but at the time was thought to not extend significantly (>2 mm) and was not clear white. The eye stripe was also pale. The dirty white supercilium is suggestive of *rama* (Svensson 2001).

Wings, mantle and tail. The bird had pale brown-grey colouration on the mantle, with wings a similar ground colour with pale fringes to the coverts. The tertials had dark shaft streaks, darkish centres and pale fringes. They were not plain but were judged as not strikingly dark blackish with triangular markings, as seen in other individuals of *caligata* seen on North Ronaldsay in August 2012 and 2015. Tertial shaft streaks are often present in both species but are likely to appear more obvious in contrast to *rama*'s pale tertial centres (Van Duivendijk 2010) which appeared to be more the case here. It is worth noting the white to the outer tips of outer tail feathers, with a neat white edge on T5 and more white on T6, which is a feature associated with *rama* (Svensson 2001).

Legs and underparts. Pale whitish underneath, typical of the group, no warm tones on flanks. The leg colour was greyish without any contrast, giving a 'booted' appearance, though this feature can be shown in first-winter individuals of both species (Van Duivendijk 2011, Shririhai & Svensson 2018).

Subsequent DNA analysis

The DNA analysis in 2017 supported a positive identification of Booted Warbler (*I. caligata*) much to the surprise of the NRBO team. The mt DNA (ref IR01) sequencing process result was 567bp of cytochrome b DNA, 1–5bp (*c.* 1%) different from *existing*, known-*caligata* sequences, and at least 45bp (*c.* 8%) different from known-*rama* sequences. The analysis was of mt DNA (mitochondrial DNA) which is inherited maternally so confirms an ancestral

Table 2. Summary of plumage features seperating Sykes's Warbler and Booted Warbler (based on Svensson 2003, Hume *et al.* 2016).

Feature	North Ronaldsay Booted Warbler 2016	Sykes's Warbler	Booted Warbler
Supercilium	Non-distinct, mostly in front of eye	Less distinct, not pure white	Distinct, extending behind eye
Eye stripe	Pale	Pale between eye & bill	Weak dark line between eye & bill
Bill	Mid-range, dark smudge to lower mandible with pale tip	Long, pale tip	Short, fine with dark tip
Legs	Greyish, no obvious 'boots'	Longer, dark grey	Pinkish brown
Tertials	Dark shaft streaks, paler centres & weak paler fringes	Plain	Dark centred
Tail	Longish, rounded, with short inner tail feathers	Long, graduated	Short, square ended

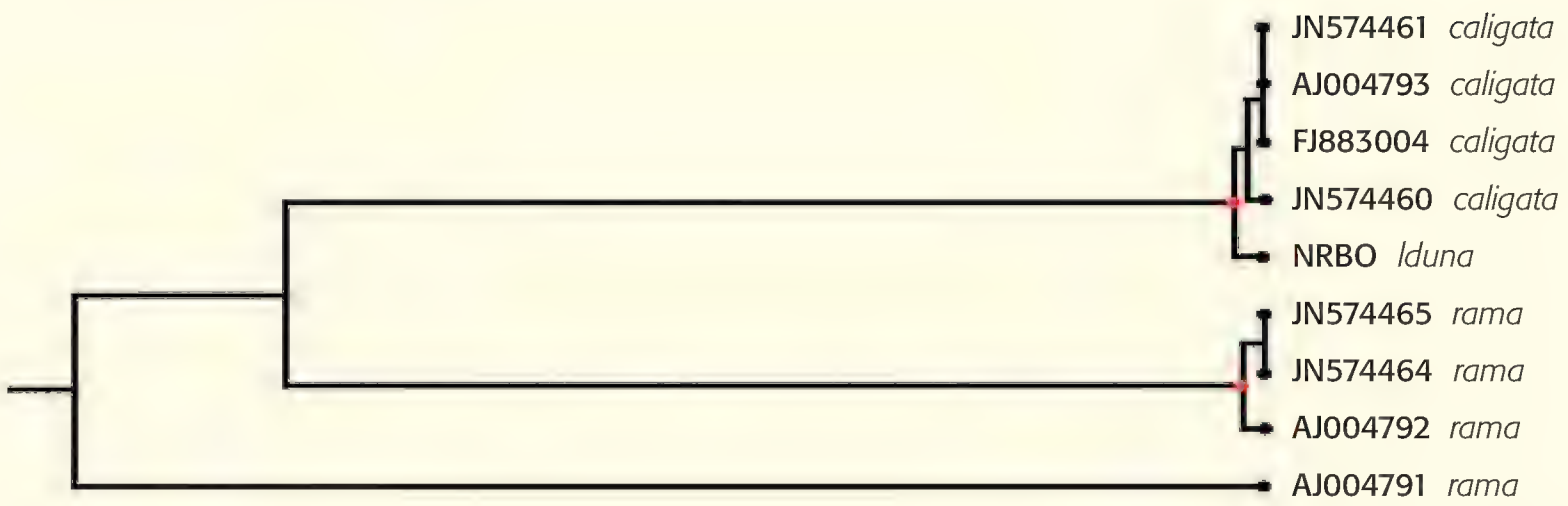


Figure 1. Phylogenetic tree based on comparison of cytb sequences from the North Ronaldsay *Iduna* warbler ('NRBO *Iduna*') and the database sequences from known Booted Warbler *caligata*, Sykes's Warbler *rama* and Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *I. pallida* specimens. Nodes with 100% bootstrap statistical support are highlighted in red. The North Ronaldsay bird's sequence groups most closely with the *caligata* group, and as such is identified as a Booted Warbler, and eliminating the possibility of Sykes's Warbler.

lineage of Booted Warbler (on the female side) for this bird, but does not rule out the possibility it is a hybrid, however unlikely this is considered to be. Analysis of genomic DNA would be required to resolve this, and this is currently not readily achieved due to the relative lack of available nuclear DNA sequences for the two species, and their close relationship.

Plate 67. Booted Warbler, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 28 August 2016. © *George Gay*

Discussion

Previous records of Sykes's and Booted Warbler on North Ronaldsay appear to have involved more distinct, 'classic' looking birds. This bird is certainly not a straightforward 'classic'. Given the individual's behavior and 'non-classic' appearance, it required trapping for identification. Such difficult individuals in the Sykes's/Booted pairing are not unknown (see Lidster 2009). In this case, if DNA had not been put forward for analysis, the balance of biometric data and plumage characteristics were weighted towards Sykes's Warbler, leading to the question: can these two species always be reliably identified in the hand, let alone in the field?

As more individuals of these two species are discovered and studied well in Western Europe, the greater the amount of information that will hopefully be amassed in terms of biometric and plumage variation, and instances causing confusion. For trapped birds, it is important that this is coupled with the benefit of mt DNA sampling. It is worth highlighting, as in this case, the identification of this species pairing is not always straightforward. This individual is presumably an extreme variant of Booted Warbler, with a notably long tail length, ambiguous biometrics and plumage features. However, there is a possibility that it is a hybrid which cannot be proved or disproved with the method of DNA analysis, and which could account for the mixed features.

There are two previous records of Sykes's Warbler on North Ronaldsay: in 2002 (Lees *et al.* 2002) and 2003 - the only records for Orkney There are three previous records of Booted Warbler on North Ronaldsay: 1993, 2012 and 2015 [there was also an as-yet un-submitted individual photographed in 2002] (NRBO 2017).

Acknowledgements

To those who have helped with the final text: Erin Taylor, Alison Duncan (whose BBRC submission aided this article), Samuel Perfect and Kevin Woodbridge. Elements of this article first appeared in the North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory Report for 2016. Also, thanks to NRBO for use of equipment to facilitate trapping and processing of the bird as well as library facilities, and to the Scottish Ornithologists' Club for use of the George Waterston Library.

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Plate 68. Booted Warbler, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 28 August 2016. © *George Gay*

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Plate 69. Black-headed Gulls awaiting inspection, Glasgow, January 2018. © *Gavin Baptie*

Ringed Black-headed Gulls in the Greater Glasgow area

G. BAPTIE

Glasgow and many of its surrounding areas are blessed with a number of parks which see large numbers of wintering gulls, including many Black-headed Gulls which visit the parks to rest, loaf, preen and feed. Wintering gulls are also to be found along the River Clyde in Glasgow and further out towards the Clyde estuary. These gatherings of gulls present good opportunities to read colour and metal rings, to discover more about their origins and movements.

From the winter of 2016/17, and then more intensively in the winters of 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20, I paid regular visits to parks and some other sites in and around Glasgow with the aim of reading rings on gulls. The most frequently visited parks were Richmond Park, Hogganfield Loch LNR, Victoria Park, Knightswood Park and Elder Park in Glasgow and the James Hamilton Heritage Loch in East Kilbride. Visits were also carried out on a more ad hoc basis to Queen's Park, Alexandra Park and Springburn Park in Glasgow, and to several parks in the wider Greater Glasgow area, such as Barshaw Park in Paisley, Robertson Park in Renfrew, Dalmuir Park in Clydebank and Castle Semple Loch in Lochwinnoch, and also to Strathclyde Country Park and the more accessible locations along the River Clyde in central Glasgow. 'Winter' is given a generous definition here and refers generally to the period of August to March when non-breeding Black-headed Gulls are present in numbers in Glasgow and the surrounding areas where observations were made.

A total of 138 ringed Black-headed Gulls were recorded and their rings successfully read during these visits over the four winters. A further number of Black-headed Gulls ringed in Glasgow in the winter period by the Clyde Ringing Group were recorded but are excluded from this article which is intended to set out information on birds ringed away from Glasgow. A total of 401 observations were made of these 138 gulls, with some birds being observed on a single occasion over the period, and others being observed on multiple occasions within a single winter or in more than one winter.

Ringing histories for each bird were obtained from ringers identified through the European Colour-Ringed Birding website (cr-birding.org) in the case of colour-rings (sometimes referred to as 'darvic' rings), and from the Euring website (app.bto.org/euring/lang/pages/rings.jsp) in the case of metal rings. Colour-rings constituted 58% of the rings successfully read and 42% were records of birds with metal rings only. Norwegian colour-rings were reported on the excellent live sightings database (www.ring merking.no/cr), which allows instant access to ringing details and previous and subsequent sightings. Some examples of the gulls observed are in Plate 71 a–d. Several ringers were kind enough to provide me with information when birds were subsequently recorded by other observers and on breeding grounds, the latter allowing a good picture to be built up of the movements of many individual birds between their breeding and wintering territories.

Many of the locations allow close approaches to birds where they appear generally habituated to the presence of people, which is reflected in the success in reading metal rings on so many birds. Information received from ringers and ringing authorities showed that 68% of all the ringed birds observed had not previously been

Plate 70 a. Icelandic-ringed Black-headed Gull, Renfrew, December 2018. **b.** Czech-ringed Black-headed Gull, East Kilbride, November 2017. **c.** North-East Scotland colour-ringed Black-headed Gull, Glasgow, December 2016. **d.** Clyde colour-ringed Black-headed Gull, Glasgow, January 2020. *© All by Gavin Baptie*

reported (although it should be noted that unlike some ringing authorities, the BTO, which provides information on birds ringed with metal rings in Britain and Ireland, does not provide details on any previous sightings, so this figure might be lower). With that caveat, only two of the metal-only ringed birds had been previously reported.

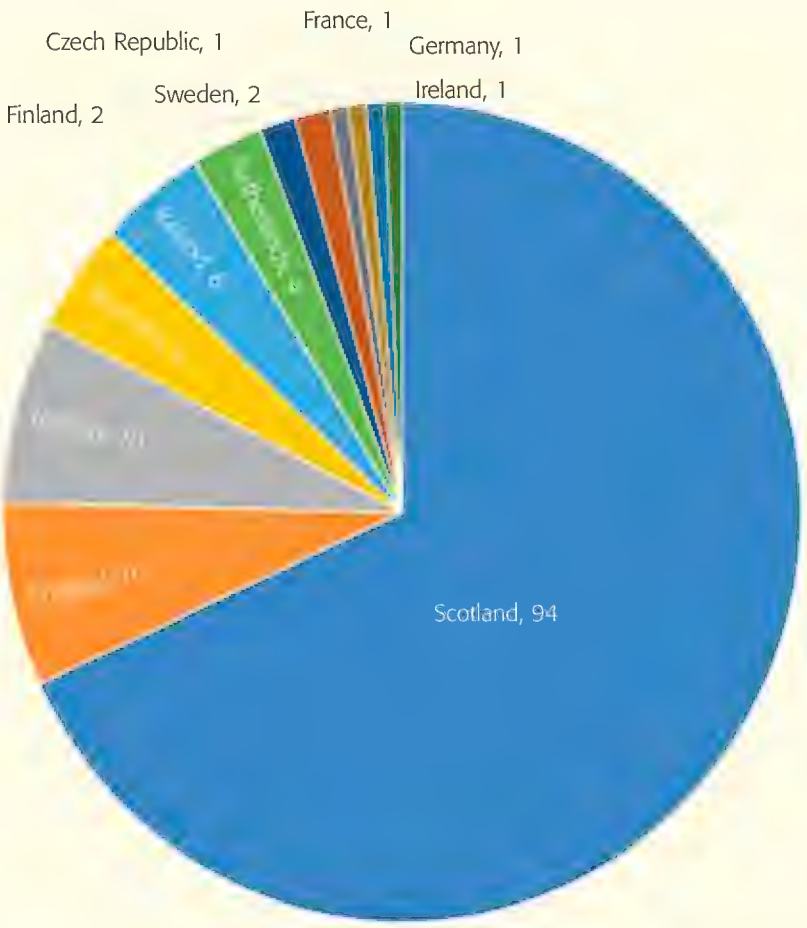

Figure 1. Ringed Black-headed Gulls by country of ringing.

The results show that Black-headed Gulls wintering in Glasgow and the surrounding area originate from at least 12 countries: Scotland (94 birds representing 68.1% of the total recorded), England (10 or 7.2%), Norway (10 or 7.2%), Denmark (6 or 4.3%), Iceland (6 or 4.3%), The Netherlands (4 or 2.9%), Finland (2 or 1.4%), Sweden (2 or 1.4%), the Czech Republic (1 or 0.7%), France (1 or 0.7%), Germany (1 or 0.7%) and the Republic of Ireland (1 or 0.7%) - see Figure 1. Figure 2 shows the ringing locations for all birds. It is notable that there were a number of observations of birds which had moved north to winter in Scotland from their original ringing locations, whereas many Black-headed Gulls are generally believed to move west and south to winter.

24% of the birds were ringed outside Britain or Ireland, a higher proportion than suggested for the wider western half of Scotland than in one recent estimate of 9% (Coulson 2019). Of the 94 birds ringed in Scotland, 31 were ringed at one breeding colony in South Lanarkshire, 18 at the Ythan Estuary and 10 at one site in the Scottish Borders. This naturally to some extent reflects the intensity of ringing effort in breeding colonies by local ringing groups. Figure 3 presents a full breakdown of the Scottish recording areas where the birds were originally ringed.

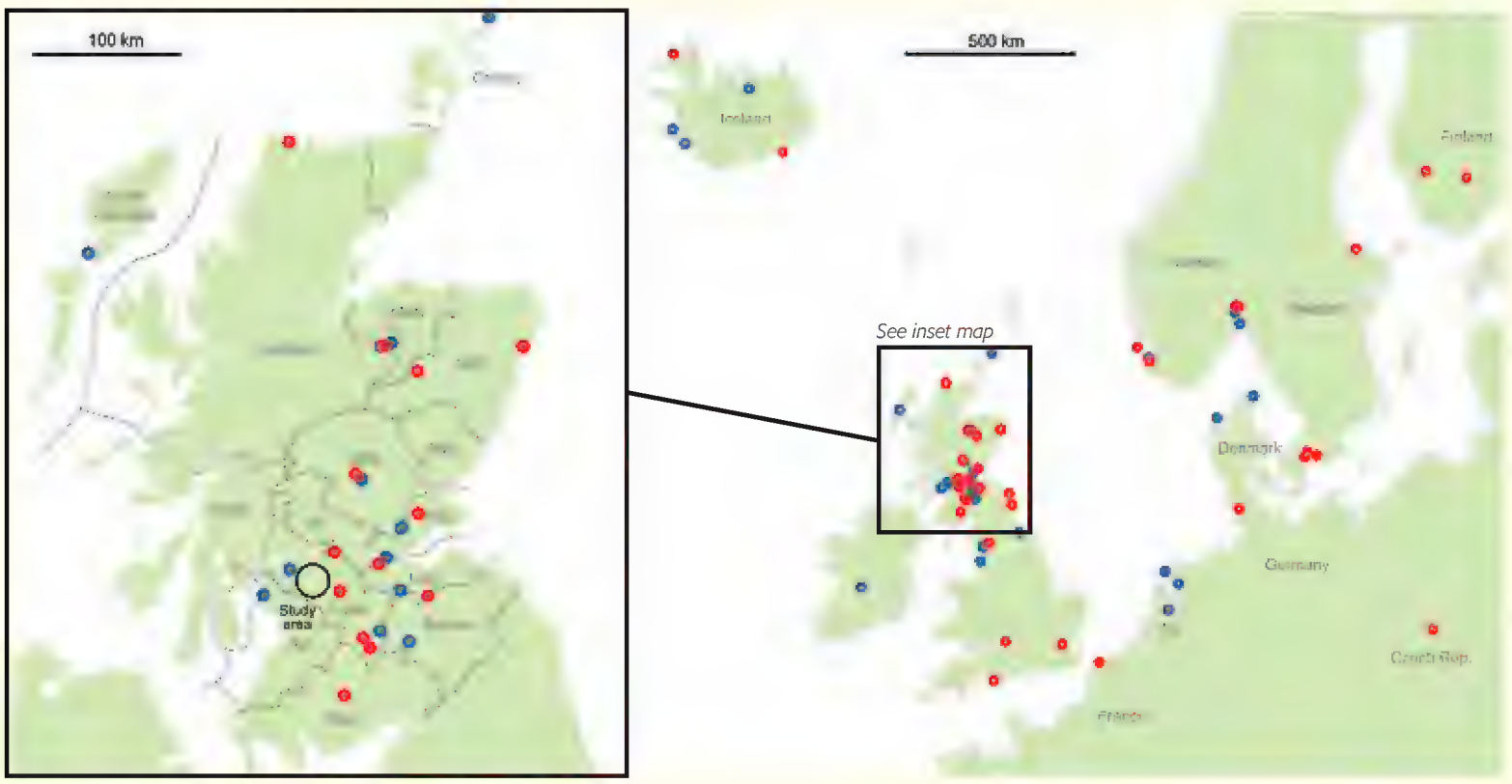

Figure 2. Ringing locations of Black-headed Gulls observed in the Glasgow area in 2016/17 to 2019/20. Blue = in one winter and red = in more than one winter.

Carrying out the observations over four winters allowed information to be gathered on returning birds and site fidelity. Of the 138, 54 were observed in more than one winter, often in exactly the same location (even on the same row of paving stones in the case of one Icelandic bird, and the same stretch of railings in the case of a returning Norwegian one!) as in previous winters. Several birds were observed in different locations across the four winters and even in the course of a single winter, showing that birds make use of different locations within the same general area.

The observations produced some further notable results, including the first Czech-ringed Black-headed Gull ever reported from Scotland and a significant number of birds ringed in Iceland. While it may be unsurprising that urban locations in the west of Scotland are visited by birds from Iceland, it is notable that up until 2019 (the most recent publicly available information at the time of writing), only 116 Icelandic-ringed Black-headed Gulls had ever been reported to the BTO from the whole of Britain and Ireland (Robinson *et al.* 2020), and six were recorded in the four winter periods in Glasgow, which suggests general under-recording of Icelandic-ringed Black-headed Gulls in Britain and Ireland. All observations of Icelandic gulls were of metal rings only, which may explain why comparatively fewer reports of Icelandic rings are made. Aside from Black-headed Gulls, observations were also made of a smaller number of ringed Common, Herring, Lesser Black-backed and Mediterranean Gulls of various origins, as well as a number of ringed ducks, geese and swans.

Gulls present excellent opportunities for ring reading, particularly as they can be found in numbers in many areas. With many ringing schemes in Scotland and beyond, and increasingly easy access to ringers' contact details through the cr-birding website, I would encourage other birders to take an interest in looking for and reporting ringed birds. It's a great way to generate interest from what can be seen as less than inspiring urban locations and at a time of year when

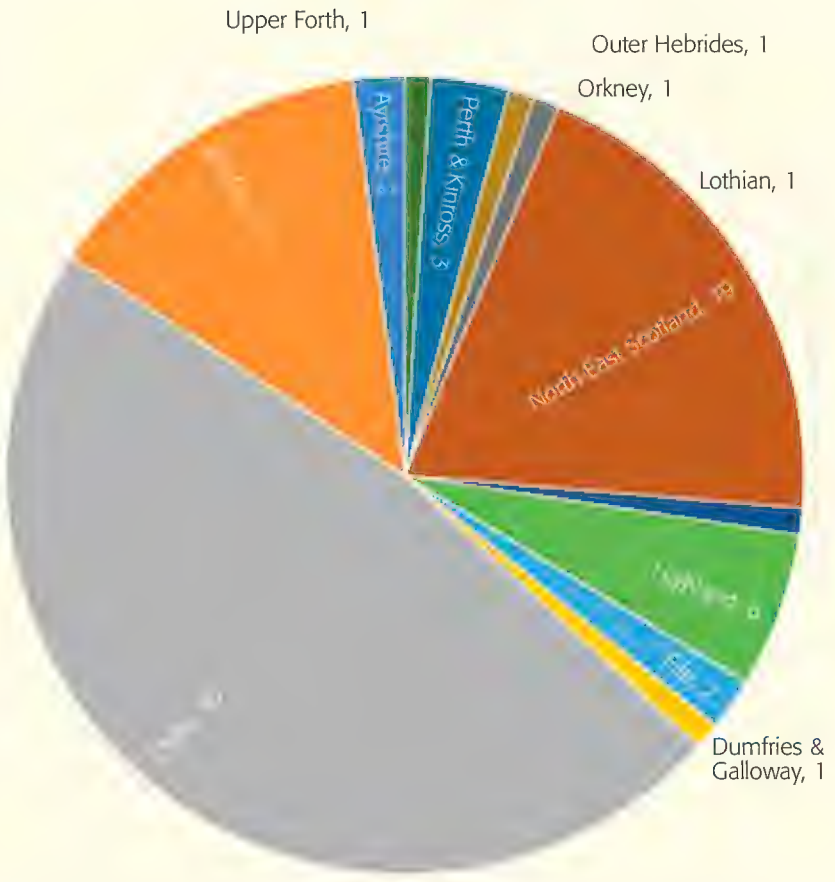

Figure 3. Origins of ringed Black-headed Gulls observed in the Glasgow area according to Scottish recording area.

birding options can sometimes appear limited. It also provides an opportunity to generate valuable data for ringers' and researchers' projects.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to all ringers and ringing authorities to whom I reported ringed birds for providing information on the birds' histories (and to Iain Livingstone, Paul Baker, Calum Campbell and Tom Dougall in particular). Thank you also to Malcolm Baptie for help with mapping data, and to fellow ring readers Scott Black, Stephen Welch and Scott Wotherspoon for sharing of information and enthusiasm.

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Greenish Warbler, Tarbat Ness, 26 August 2020 – 2nd record for Highland

P. STRONACH

An unusual late August easterly weather system had me heading for Tarbat Ness early morning on 26 August with thoughts of Greenish Warblers. Even in the proper period of autumn, Tarbat Ness is very hit or miss, so an early trip like this was optimistic to say the least!

By late morning, all that Bob Swann and I had managed to muster was a Wood Warbler and a Willow Warbler, pretty slim pickings! The last place to check was Wilkhaven Farm, and as we neared the front garden two passerines were flicking about in the Sycamores, a Willow Warbler and another warbler, which I was delighted to see, was a wing-barred *Phyllosc.* And further views soon confirmed it as a Greenish Warbler! It's not often you go out in the morning hoping to find a rare species and find it later that day - such a good feeling!

Unusually, the bird was an adult male, which briefly burst into full song whilst we were watching it. It's also very unusual to see a singing Siberian passerine in warm sunshine on the Highland coast.

This is only the second record for Highland following Dean MacAskill's bird on 24 August 2013, also at Tarbat Ness. Although there have been well over 150 records across Scotland, and it is an expected early autumn vagrant, Highland has struggled. For such a large area, Highland lacks observer coverage especially in that late August 'Greenish Warbler period'. The very specific conditions needed to produce birds at our one decent east coast migration 'hotspot' also doesn't help!

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Plate 71. Greenish Warbler, Tarbat Ness, Highland, 26 August 2020. © *Peter Stronach*

Plate 72. Cattle Egret, RSPB Loch of Strathbeg, North-East Scotland, 5 September 2020. © *Harry Scott*

Cattle Egret, Loch of Strathbeg RSPB reserve, 3–5 September 2020 - first record for North-East Scotland

K. & R. BARNES

It was the final morning of our three-day birding break on the Aberdeenshire coast - the birding had been interesting but nothing had really set our pulses racing.

We arrived at Loch of Strathbeg on the morning of 3 September with the hope of something a little more exciting, we usually find that a visit to this reserve produces something different. The information centre was, of course, closed due to COVID-19 restrictions, so we initially had a look through the viewing screen which has a restricted view of the Starnafin Pools. Immediately obvious was the Great White Egret which had been present for several days; that was good for starters. We walked round the buildings to the new area for viewing over the pools, and while I was setting up the scope to scan the pool margins in the hope of an interesting wader, Rosie said "do you realise that there is a second egret down there". I immediately got the scope onto it expecting to see a fine black bill. I was very surprised to see that although it was much smaller than the Great White Egret, this bird also had a yellow bill. It was obviously a Cattle Egret, a species we had seen hundreds of previously, but this was our first in the UK. It was even behaving in the correct manner, wandering around under one of the resident wild Konik Horses. I immediately returned to the car to get my camera and also alerted a very doubtful looking member of the reserve staff, who then put the news out. Returning to the bird I took a few photographs, but it was a bit too far for anything other than record shots.

With its recent colonisation of parts of England, we knew that we would add Cattle Egret to our British List one day, but certainly didn't expect it to be in the north of Scotland. Loch of Strathbeg had come up trumps yet again!

Keith & Rosie Barnes, Contin, Ross-shire.
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Plate 73. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Balephuil, Tiree, Argyll, 17 September 2020. © *Mark Rayment*

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Balephuil, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, 15–23 September 2020 – the first record for the Western Palearctic

J. BOWLER

I have long held the ambition of finding a first for Britain, or even better, a first for the Western Palearctic, and living and working on the isolated Inner Hebridean Isle of Tiree, I've always felt this might just be possible. After nearly 20 years on the island, I had come close with the first Scottish record of Northern Parula in September 2010 and had found other rare Scottish passerines like Western Bonelli's Warbler (September 2006), Brown Shrike (October 2011), Cedar Waxwing (September 2013), Collared Flycatcher (May 2014) and Swainson's Thrush (September 2016) but the really big one still eluded me.

A fast-moving depression whipped across the North Atlantic and its centre struck the Isle of Tiree early on Sunday 13 September 2020. Conditions looked ideal for bringing in a North American bird or two, and I even fantasized about finding an Empidonax flycatcher... However, despite several Nearctic waders appearing nearby on the Outer Hebrides, checks of my local patch at Balephuil later that day produced nothing new other than a Lesser Whitethroat and a small influx of Lesser Black-backed Gulls. A fresh juvenile Common Rosefinch popped up briefly in our garden the following day, and with the winds slackening in a ridge of high pressure, my thoughts switched back towards drift migrants from the east.

First thing on Tuesday 15 September, I casually opened the curtains of our lounge windows with a cup of tea in hand, to reveal a boldly-marked flycatcher eyeing me from just three metres away in the pond-side willows of our back-garden. Rich olive-green above, with a

complete bold eye-ring, an orange lower mandible, a distinct yellow suffusion on the throat and down the centre of breast and belly, olive-washed breast sides and very striking yellowish-buff wing-bars and edgings to the tertials and secondaries - it was an Empidonax flycatcher! I grabbed my bridge camera, which I always have close to hand during migration periods, and took some record shots, to make sure I wasn't dreaming. Sure enough, the bird was real and seemed very happy sallying for insects from the trees in our sheltered garden.

Identification was straightforward enough, as I have seen most of the North American Empidonax flycatchers over the years during various trips to the Americas. The relatively short tail, large head with a complete eye-ring of even width, imparting a "cute" expression, and rather compact structure quickly narrowed it down to it being either a Least or a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. From there, the obvious yellow suffusion on the throat and central underparts, the rich olive-green upperparts, plus immaculate condition of its tail and flight feathers pronounced it to be a first-winter Yellow-bellied Flycatcher - the first for the Western Palearctic - and a species I have seen several times before in Mexico and Belize. The ID was subsequently confirmed by North American birders, who ruled out the similar, but even more unlikely, Western Flycatcher by the diagnostic distribution of the primary tips on the folded wing.

With the ID sorted, I then simply enjoyed watching this exotic-looking bird foraging happily in the trees that I have planted over the years in our garden for just such an occasion. Island-based birders live for moments like this, but this was big news to break to my wife Janet. Together with a few others, we mulled over what to do with the news, particularly in the light of the worsening COVID-19 situation on the mainland and the absence at the time of the disease on the island, which has a large vulnerable elderly population. In the end, despite deciding not to put the news out, the sightings information somehow found its own way out and we were faced with a potentially large twitch the following day.

Plate 74. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Balephuil, Tiree, Argyll, 17 September 2020. © *Chris Griffin*

Plate 75. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Balephuil, Tiree, Argyll, 17 September 2020. © *Chris Griffin*

With great help from the Tiree Ranger, Hayley Douglas, my wife Janet and our very accommodating neighbours, who enabled car-parking in their drive, we were able to manage a successful socially-distanced twitch following Scottish COVID-19 guidelines over the next three days in which some 120 birders got to see the bird in the two neighbouring private gardens. The flycatcher performed admirably on the first two days, showing down to less than two metres at times, allowing many fantastic photos to be taken. The bird proved much harder to see on the third day, when it spent much time foraging on the far side of the gardens and was often out of sight, with some folk queueing patiently for up to six hours before connecting with it. In calmer weather, it sallied high into our willows and Sycamores, but on windier days it would forage closer to the ground in the dense willows, often perching for long periods on our garden gate and wall. At times, there was concern about the bird's health as it would occasionally simply rest and close its eyes after intense spells of foraging, but apparently this is typical Empidonax flycatcher behaviour, with long rests taken in between feeding bouts to allow the stomach to digest the mass of ingested insect food. The bird was generally silent, but I twice heard it calling with an emphatic high-pitched peeping alarm call when a Merlin passed over the gardens.

Plate 76. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher twitch, Balephuil, Tiree, Argyll, 16 September 2020. © *John Bowler*

By the third day of the twitch, there were mounting concerns on Tiree's social media channels with regards to COVID-19 and the continuing influx of birders to the island from all over Britain. We were therefore forced to announce that access was closed to the gardens from midnight on Friday 18 September. Despite this, a trickle of birders continued to arrive and try their luck each day until the bird finally left, with most managing to connect with the flycatcher from the adjacent public track. The bird finally departed on the night of 23 September after a nine-day stay, during which it fed voraciously on a wide range of insects including many of our neighbours' honeybees and showed no concern at all for the close attention it received. It left on a cold, clear night with a light northerly breeze, which would appear to have been ideal conditions for continuing its migration south. All visiting birders were very well-behaved and together raised at least £1,900 for the Tiree Community Trust through a donations bucket and a JustGiving page, which was much appreciated and should help to quell any lingering concerns about the twitch on the island.

Lifetime ambition achieved, with that dazzling American flycatcher still fresh in my mind, I'm tempted to hang up my bins now, but I know of course that I won't!

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Plate 77. Tennessee Warbler, Burravoe, Yell, Shetland, 29 September 2020. © *Rebecca Nason*

Tennessee Warbler, Burravoe, Yell, 29 September to 4 October 2020 – 3rd record for Shetland

D. PRESTON

The morning of 29 September 2020 started pretty much as normal in Burravoe. After helping to get my son ready for nursery, I had time to check my local patch to see if anything new had arrived. This had been my routine for a few weeks now, especially since autumn had started properly. I'd only got a few yards out the door when I heard on the local WhatsApp group that an Arctic Warbler had just been found at the North end of Yell. This got me to wondering what new birds would be on my patch. Very quickly I was finding Yellow-browed Warblers in almost every Sycamore tree, and with them at least one Willow Warbler - it was certainly a lot better than yesterday!

While checking through the warblers, I noticed what I thought at first glance would turn out to be another Willow Warbler, but it had a very yellow breast, and a rather noticeable grey pointed bill - not really what I'd been expecting. I rattled off a few photos, then stood and gazed at the results on the back of the camera. This certainly didn't look like any European 'leaf' warbler I'd seen before. The legs were slate grey, the tail very short, the undertail coverts were white, and as for that pointed grey bill! Alarm bells were ringing in my head, and my first thoughts went to the Tennessee Warbler that had recently been seen in Iceland. Surely it was too much to hope there could now be one on my local patch?

After a few minutes, I left the bird feeding happily with its accompanying Yellow-browed Warblers, and headed home to look further into this bird's identity. I uploaded the images to my computer, and then the realization of what I was looking at really set in. On the computer screen the birds resemblance to the image I'd seen of the recent Icelandic bird was way too close to ignore. My hands were truly shaking as I phoned and messaged a couple of local birders, who I hoped could confirm my find. After seeing my initial images, one very-respected local birder replied that he was on his

Plate 78. Tennessee Warbler, Burravoe, Yell, Shetland, 1 October 2020. © *Mark Rayment*

way, and the other two replied with confirmatory expletives! I returned to the garden, which is only a hundred yards from my house, and soon met up with the first of the arriving local birders. Very quickly the bird was refound in the same trees where it was originally seen - I could finally relax, as the other birders could indeed confirm I wasn't hallucinating.

Since this was just the fifth time a Tennessee Warbler had been seen in the UK, and could potentially be the first one to be twitchable, it seemed obvious it was going to attract a great deal of interest. After all, Shetland is rightly popular with visiting birders at this time of year for exactly this reason. Thankfully access to this bird was never going to be an issue, as the birds chosen feeding area would be easily viewable from public roads and surrounding fields, and ample parking is available in the surrounding area. It was finally time to send out the message on the local WhatsApp Rare Sightings group, as it was still early, and would give visiting and local birders maximum time to arrive and enjoy this bird.

The bird stayed in its chosen gardens in Burravoe for six days. This allowed all the local and holidaying birders in Shetland to connect with it on its first day, and hundreds of birders from the rest of Britain over the rest of its stay. Even after it left, there was a continuous presence of optimistic birders for at least another week.

Occasionally, you hear from others that identification of certain birds are relatively easy. When looking at photos on the internet, or turning up to a bird that's already been identified it certainly is, but when you have just found a potential mega, and the adrenaline kicks in, it's always good to have a second opinion on hand. Up here in Shetland we have a great bunch of very knowledgeable birders, and at times like this it's much appreciated - big thanks to all those who helped confirm my identification before it went public.

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Tennesssee Warbler status in Scotland

This Nearctic species breeds in mixed and deciduous woodland from southernmost Alaska and Yukon, British Columbia, and northernmost USA through Ontario east to Newfoundland and northern New England. It is entirely migratory, passing through the Mexican Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean to/from wintering grounds from southern Mexico to northern Ecuador, Colombia and northern Venezuela.

There have been four accepted records of Tennessee Warbler in Britain to the end of 2019, all in Scotland:

1975 Fair Isle first-winter, 6–20 September (trapped & ringed 18th)
1975 Fair Isle first-winter, 24 September, (trapped & ringed)
1982 Orkney first-year, Holm 5–7 September (trapped & ringed 7th)
1995 Outer Hebrides one, St. Kilda, 20 September.

All records were of birds found from 5–24 September, quite early for Nearctic vagrants to Britain in autumn, which presumably reflects its early migration movements in the USA, which typically occur on a broad front inland and over a protracted period. This may account for the geographic distribution of records, which may be birds displaced while over the eastern Gulf of Mexico/Caribbean by early fast-tracking trans-Atlantic weather systems crossing the North Atlantic.

Plate 79. Siberian Thrush, Kilminning, Fife, 2 October 2020. © *Steve Buckland*

Siberian Thrush, Kilminning, Fife, 30 September to 5 October 2020 – first record for mainland Scotland

K.D. SHAW

The global pandemic and its effect on cancelling access to various migration islands found me spending most of the autumn of 2020 at home in the East Neuk of Fife, working my local patch, Fife Ness.

The autumn started well, with a Greenish Warbler and some very good sea-watching. In sport we are always told that momentum is important, and the same is true for bird finding. On 30 September Angus Duncan and Willie Irvine photographed a Common Rosefinch at Lower Kilminning, and Angus kindly put one of his images on one of the Fife birding chatlines. Common Rosefinches have the reputation of being 'short stayers' at the Ness so I didn't give it too much thought. However, I awoke early the next morning, to darkness and awful weather. On the spur of the moment I decided to drive the short distance to Lower Kilminning and sit in the car beside the 'Eastern Oli bushes' where the Rosefinch was photographed. The Fife birdwatchers know these bushes well, named after the Eastern Olivaceous Warbler that frequented the bushes for a few days in the autumn of 2012.

It was still dark when I arrived and consequently I got parked in a good position - there wasn't much competition at that time and I turned on Radio 4 (yes, really!). Around mid-morning, in reasonable light but pouring rain, I briefly saw a small thrush deep in one of the Elder bushes. I could only see one wing but it didn't fit 'the usuals'. There were seven Redwing present, usually on the ground although two of them did occasionally fly into the same bush to feed on the berries. The wing pattern of this bird was different and I knew it wasn't a Song Thrush! I had never thought of this before but clearly there are very few alternatives with small Palearctic thrushes. The bird disappeared and local birders arrived looking for the Rosefinch. Everyone stayed in their car and I enjoyed the challenge of getting them on to the Rosefinch, which by now was showing erratically. During a break in the proceedings I used my phone to 'Google' images of first-winter female Siberian Thrush... mmmhh!

I remember once, long ago, discussing with Ian Andrews how rarity finding can be stressful. Usually this stress comes from the pressure of

decision making. Always asking yourself if you are doing the right thing and at what point or at what level of confidence one can 'put the news out'. In this case there was no stress, simply because there was no other strategy. I just had to wait for clinching views. So wait I would, in the car, even until the light went completely if that's what it took. I was comfortable and there seemed to be plenty of time. That was to change! As we all know, time goes fast in these situations and becomes the enemy.

There was only one other car there, just before 15:30 hrs, when the thrush was suddenly there again. It was now or never! It was in the middle of the bush and facing away, of course it was! However, it turned its head for a second and I got the face pattern... wow! Then it leant forward and I got the undertail coverts. Actually, if you think about it, there aren't that many feature on a 1cy female Siberian Thrush... and I had most of them, albeit incredibly briefly. Thirty years before I had missed the opportunity to identify and call a very rare bird elsewhere in Scotland. That was a very hard lesson for me back then, but I had learnt it and that tough lesson has stayed with me through several situations like the one I was in. I knew that the last 10% of identification wasn't technique, it wasn't experience, it wasn't knowledge, it was simply the 'bottle' to call an extremely rare bird. I hadn't seen the whole bird, my views were fleeting, to say the least, but it was time. I had to give others the chance to get to the site with a good light and a bit of time. In these situations my thoughts always turn to the local birders, they are the ones I go through the lean times with. I managed to explain to the birdwatchers in the other car and then went straight into the Fife Bird News WhatsApp group on my phone and typed in "SIBERIAN THRUSH 1st-y fem, Lower Kilminning". To cover myself, I forwarded the message to other groups causing panic in a Dunfermline Deli and confusion on the Azores and with the Anstruther COVID-19 community group! Letting a rare bird out has to be absolute - you ain't found it 'til you've called it - so call it strong. A strong, positive call also helps to diminish the influence of the tiny group of conspiracy theorists who would later say I misidentified it, or I didn't find it, or I suppressed it or I flushed it (surely the last one can't be true, I didn't leave the car!).

Plate 80. Siberian Thrush, Kilminning, Fife, 1 October 2020. © *Peter Stronach*

Communication is amazing these days. In years gone by I had run (sort of) across various islands to jammed telephones by lonely airports to get the news of rare eastern thrushes out. However, as my crews always reminded me, I was the one who most needed the exercise!

The locals arrived quickly, no surprise there, although with everyone remaining in their cars communication was tricky, I got the message of the bird's whereabouts and habits across to them. I thought they had about a 50/50 chance of the bird being seen again that day, but I was aware that the other Sib Thrushes I had seen in Scotland were all 'one day jobs'. We would see, time would tell. Anyway, it was time for me to go home!

As it happened, they didn't see it that afternoon but the next morning there were brief sightings early on. I never know what to make of these brief, early sightings but at 9:37 hrs my old pal John Nadin sent me an image of the bird that Peter Stronach had taken that morning. I learnt long ago that rare bird finding doesn't often bring instant gratification, it was usually a process. To be honest, seeing this amazing image was as close as I came to being thrilled during this find. It was also the first time I saw the whole bird! I am a hopeless photographer, so the ability of guys like Peter (and some of the Fife guys) to get shots like that in a difficult situation, always amazes me. They have my respect. It also made submitting the description a lot easier, I had the image and, of course, I have a template BBRC form for Siberian Thrush... it would be a 25 minute job! The bird stayed until 5 October and was seen (albeit briefly) by many observers, a few kindly said to me that they never thought they would see one in Scotland - that was my other moment of satisfaction.

It would have been a good Fife autumn if it had ended there, but, of course, it didn't. The next day I saw my first Fife Ness Arctic Warbler in the hand, a real thrill especially as I could see the whole bird! And there was more to come for Fife...

Interesting to ask ourselves why it stayed so long. The answer is simple, I think - Kilminning provides an exceptional area for tired and hungry migrants to rest and feed up. You can help conserve it by contributing to a fund hoping to secure its future at the following site: www.crowdfunder.co.uk/south-kilminning-community-ownership.

Ken Shaw, Anstruther, Fife.
Email: kenshaw495@gmail.com

Siberian Thrush status in Scotland

This species has two subspecies with all records in Europe assigned to the NW form Geokichla sibirica sibirica *which breeds in coniferous taiga forest in the Eastern Palaearctic from central Russia/Siberia eastwards to the Sea of Ohkutsk, and south of about 65°N to Mongolia and NE China. It is entirely migratory and winters discontinuously in SE Asia from Myanmar and southernmost China south through Thailand, Cambodia, and Korea to Malaysia.*

There have been 12 accepted records of Siberian Thrush in Britain up to the end of 2019, with nine of these in Scotland. The Scottish records have all been on Scottish islands as follows:

1954 Isle of May adult male, 1–4 October (trapped & ringed 2nd)
1984 Orkney, male, Widewall Bay, South Ronaldsay, 13 November
1992 Orkney first-year female, North Ronaldsay, 1–8 October (trapped & ringed 1st)
2007 Shetland first-year male, Hametoun, Foula, 28 September
2008 Fair Isle first-year male, Guidicum, 25 September
2014 Shetland first-year female, Scousburgh, Mainland (trapped) - this bird had been ringed at Husoya, Traena, south of the Lofoten Isles, Norway on 24 September that year.
2015 Fair Isle first-year male, Hoini/Steensi, 5 October
2016 Shetland first-year male, Uyeasound, Unst, 6 October
2017 Shetland female, Baltasound, Unst, 20 September

In addition there have been three records in England - two in Norfolk (a male in Great Yarmouth on 25 December 1977 and a first-year male at Burnham Overy on 18 September 1994) and one on Scilly (a first-year male on St. Agnes on 5–8 October 1999) plus two in Ireland - on Cape Clear, Co. Clare on 18 October 1985 and at Loop Head, Co Clare on 31 October 2004.

All Scottish records have been in autumn, found between 20 September and 6 October, except for the 1984 Orkney bird - the latter suggesting a rather wider window for searching for this species, while the bird in Norfolk on Christmas Day 1977 may have made landfall further north and filtered southward thereafter. The geographical spread of records is typical of a rare eastern vagrant, with well-watched areas, often with little vegetation, at the fore, making the discovery of the Kilminning bird, which frequented a thick area of cover, all the more remarkable.

Plate 81. Dusky Warblers, **a)** Balephuil, Tiree, Argyll, 14 October 2020. © *John Bowler.* **b)** Rubha Dearg, Wester Ross, Highland, 9 November 2020. © *Peter Stronach*

Dusky Warblers in Scotland during the autumn of 2020

J. BOWLER, B.A. TAYLOR & P. STRONACH

Balephuil, Isle of Tiree, 14 October 2020 - the first record for Argyll

After strong north-easterly winds on 13 October 2020, the following morning dawned sunny and calm (E1–2 winds) and the trees and bushes in our garden at Balephuil, Tiree were alive with the sounds of migrants that had arrived overnight. At 07:40 hrs the willows were full of the '*tseeping*' calls of Redwings, the '*chacking*' calls of Fieldfares, the assorted calls of various finches, including two Bramblings and the higher-pitched calls of four Yellow-browed Warblers. Listening out and watching the birds from our open upstairs bedroom window, as they started to stir in the bushes, a new call cut through all the rest at 07:50 hrs - a hard and urgent, repeated '*teck*' call - like a Lesser Whitethroat, but harder. This immediately sounded interesting and was interspersed at times with a tongue-smacking '*ttuc*', which having seen and heard hundreds over the years in SE Asia, immediately recalled Dusky Warbler to me - a potential first for Argyll.

The interesting calls emanated at first from the base of a large, dense willow and then shifted behind our front wall before relocating in a streamside willow beside our car park, all the while without the bird showing at all. It was clear that the mystery bird was moving through dense vegetation close to the ground in our front ditch. Once in the willow, the bird started calling even more frequently and eventually popped up into low branches overhanging the stream. Through my binoculars, I could see an essentially dark-brown *Phylloscopus* warbler, hunting for insects like a Chiffchaff, but with a bold, thin whitish supercilium running from the bill-base to behind the eye, a pair of bold white eye-ring spectacles broken by a dark line through the eye, rather stubby-looking wings with short primary projection, a rather short, narrow pointed bill and dark reddish legs. Now finally in the open, this bird could also be seen to be the source of the hard '*teck*' calls - it was indeed a Dusky Warbler!

Keen for record shots, I rushed downstairs to get my bridge camera, but the bird had moved by the time I got back to the bedroom window and it was now calling once more from deep within the ditch behind the wall. I therefore got dressed and headed out into the garden. I followed the calling bird for some 40 minutes

as it moved about unseen, working its way from our front garden to our back garden and then into our neighbour's garden. Unsure what to do next, I waited some more and then headed back around into our front garden at 08:55 hrs, whereupon the bird started calling from the streamside willow once more. It showed briefly there a few times to myself and to my wife Janet who was watching out of the bedroom window, before moving to an iris-filled ditch that leads away out to a large reed-bed. Quite luckily, I managed to get a usable record shot of the bird in the ditch there, before it disappeared into the reeds and stopped calling completely. I waited for 30 minutes but it failed to call again.

I let the news out via social media and thought that might be it for the bird, but at 11:25 hrs I heard the distinctive call again through my open office windows, emanating from the willows by the stream. I couldn't see the bird from the office window, so I headed out once more and by this time the bird had moved to a patch of nettles in our front garden where it fed by hopping along the ground. It was very confiding in the nettle bed and allowed a very close approach (to within 2 m) but was largely out of sight. I focussed my camera on a sunlit gap in the nettles and managed to obtain a few more usable record shots of the bird. The bird kept feeding in the small nettle patch, calling all the while, until it eventually moved off into our neighbour's garden at 11:50 hrs. I left the bird to it and headed back to some work in the office. Despite having my office windows open all afternoon, I did not hear or see the bird again until 17:00 hrs, when it was once again calling noisily from our front garden. It was now much more active, and showy, perching up in the open on irises in the ditch, as well as in the willows, which it now climbed up high into - mixing with Yellow-browed Warblers and some migrant Blue Tits. It was now possible to take a few more record shots of the bird in the open, although it moved about very rapidly and was also chased-on several times by a Robin. I last saw the bird at about 18:00 hrs, by which time the light was poor. The bird was very vocal, constantly calling a hard '*teck*' call, as well as a more lip-smacking '*ttuk*'. There was no sight or sound of it the following morning and it was not seen again.

Description. A small active warbler, it was about Chiffchaff-sized, although there were none nearby for direct comparison, but clearly slightly larger than the nearby Yellow-browed Warblers. The wings were rather short and rounded, showing only a short primary projection. The head was rather small but could appear slightly more peaked at times than Chiffchaff. It was also dumpier and a bit sturdier looking than Chiffchaff, with a relatively shorter-looking tail showing rounded corners at the tip. The bill was rather short, narrow and pointed, whilst the dark reddish legs were not overly stout. The bird frequently flicked its wings and flicked its tail upwards in a nervous fashion as it moved around. The bird showed rather concolorous, unstreaked, dark grey-brown upperparts - including the crown, nape and mantle. The rump, upper-tail coverts and upper tail were similarly toned to the mantle but could show some warmer rustier tones in good light. The closed wings were also a similar dark grey-brown but could also show some rustier tones in good light. The underparts were widely suffused with a dusky grey-brown wash, darkest on the chest sides and flanks, with a brighter, buffier vent and undertail coverts, leaving an obviously whiter throat and a whiter central breast. The face pattern showed prominent half-moon white eye ring crescents above and, in particular, below, the dark eye, plus a distinct, narrow whitish supercilium running from the bill to the eye and continuing well beyond the eye, where it broadened a little and became buffier. There was also a distinct, quite thick dark line below the supercilium leading from the base of the bill through the lores to the dark eye and continuing onto the ear coverts. The face sides and ear-coverts were a rather plain dark grey-brown and there was a diffusely darker area above the supercilium along the crown sides. The thin pointed bill was dark grey but had a reddish-brown base. The legs were a dark reddish-brown colour and the eyes were dark.

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Glen, Barra, 5–7 November 2020 - the third Outer Hebrides record

Many birders seem to believe that Barra birding is all about finding rarities from North America.

While we do get the occasional 'Yank', the reality is that most promising-looking Atlantic weather systems fail to deliver and birding can often be hard going during westerlies. These days I increasingly find myself hoping for a good easterly blast: there will be more common migrants, a few scarcities and a decent chance of something rare. To give a taste of Barra's recent form, the White-throated Needletail in June 2017, the Pechora Pipit in October 2018 and the Brown Shrike in November 2019 all occurred thanks to easterly winds.

The autumn of 2020 was a good one for eastern species on Barra. Things kicked off with an early Barred Warbler in mid-August, followed by a Common Rosefinch at the start of September then Citrine Wagtail, Wryneck and a stunning adult male Red-breasted Flycatcher later in the month. Yellow-browed Warblers began to arrive from 20 September. What began as a trickle of these eastern gems soon became a torrent that culminated in an amazing fall of birds in the first few days of October. Yellow-browed Warblers were everywhere with numbers peaking on 3 October when a minimum of 94 were present around the island. A few years ago we'd have been happy with just one! The eastern theme continued throughout October with Barra's first Red-flanked Bluetail found by visiting birders and good numbers of Siberian Chiffchaffs, the latter outnumbering *collybita* Chiffchaffs in the late autumn.

As we reached November I couldn't help hoping for one last good bird from the east to finish the autumn with. Pallas's and Hume's Warblers were two likely candidates and are both overdue on Barra, but it was Dusky Warbler that was making the news as record numbers had reached Western Europe.

Kathy and I were out birding from first light on 5 November. It was a clear day and for once the wind had dropped. It soon became apparent that there had been a fresh arrival of migrants: in the first two hours of daylight we logged five Siberian Chiffchaffs, two 'eastern-looking' Lesser Whitethroats and a couple of Yellow-browed Warblers. Arriving at Glen around mid-morning, we worked our way up the road, pausing to scan each bush along the way. Two-thirds of the way up the road, I heard a very brief, quiet double '*tack*' call that stopped me in my tracks. I said to Kathy that I thought I may have just heard a Dusky Warbler somewhere ahead. We stood listening but didn't hear another sound. Then a movement in a pile of cut branches a few metres ahead caught my eye. A small brown bird with a fine bill and bold supercilium was poking its head out. With bated breath I stared at it through my bins for a moment, then it hopped out into the open. It was a Wren. I figured that the call must have been this bird and as my adrenaline levels dropped and heartbeat slowed, we set off up the hill again, my pride slightly dented!

We'd only gone a few more paces when we both stopped dead. It was that call again, coming from a garden on our right. It was close and there was no mistaking it this time: it was Barra's first Dusky Warbler. Frantically, I whipped out my camera and got a sound recording so I'd have some kind of proof, as it was in an area of dense shrubs and low trees that we don't have access into, and I didn't rate our chances of seeing it. It was calling frequently and sounded as though it was moving away from us, deeper into cover. After a couple of frustrating minutes of seeing nothing, we moved up the hill a short distance, and peered over the gate of the next property, looking back into the dense vegetation. We got our first glimpse after a couple of minutes as the bird briefly flew out onto a small clump of brambles before ducking into the garden again. It was still calling a lot and mobile. After a few minutes we realised it had crossed the road into the mix of willow, fuchsia and brambles that line the burn on the other side. We were now able to get better views and a few record shots as it bounced around the bushes in the way that newly arrived migrants often do. It was reasonably easy to see in the willows, but once it dropped into the low brambles it was a different matter. It was feeding mostly at ground level and at one point we saw it move between two clumps of bramble by almost burrowing through the grass tussocks in between. We were only able to track it by the movement of the grass! Needless to say, had this bird not called, it's unlikely we'd ever have found it.

The Dusky Warbler stayed for three days, last being seen on 7 November. It called less frequently after the first day and was consequently harder to locate. Although this was the first record for Barra, there are two previous Outer Hebrides records from St Kilda on 4 October 1993 and West Gerinish, South Uist on 10 October 1994. Given the increasing numbers reaching Western Europe in recent years, I think we can be confident it will not be another 26 years before the next one.

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Rubha Dearg, Wester Ross, 9–10 November 2020 - 1st record for Highland

I was due to work near Gairloch on 9 November, and the previous night I decided to do some birding after the survey had finished. Being based in Strathspey, I don't often get across to bird in Wester Ross as much as I would like to, so I was excited to be giving it a bit of time in autumn. I always like to look on Google Maps and imagine good spots to check. My eye was drawn to Rubha Dearg/Red Point, a place I had walked several times before but never given any time looking for passerines in autumn. Another reason I wanted to check the area was that whilst I was Highland Recorder, a crofter had got in touch with me describing what could only have been a Siberian Chiffchaff from the area. There had been an arrival of Dusky Warblers at Spurn the previous day and the conditions in Highland were perfect for birds overshooting the east coast and ending up on the west, so I was optimistic of something.

On arrival, I checked some coastal gorse patches with nothing to show for my trouble, before returning back to the area around the croft. As I passed, a Collie started barking at me. This caused a bird to start calling in alarm, a metallic tacking '*tchic*'. Recognising it as a Dusky Warbler, I turned to see it making its way quickly to the top of a small tree in the garden. It then flew about 20 m in to a willow, again calling and moving quickly, and then flew again into a large area of gorse. While in the gorse patch it showed well, a couple of minutes in total, so I decided I should get some photos and a recording, but at that point it completely vanished! Slightly panicking, I widened my search and unbelievably found a Firecrest, still a rarity in Highland!

Over the next four hours, I saw the Dusky Warbler four times and managed to get some acceptable photos, but unfortunately no sound recording. I was extremely glad to hear that fellow Highland birders, Bob McMillan, and Al and Jenny McNee, managed to catch up with it the following day.

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Dusky Warbler status in Scotland

This Eastern Palearctic species breeds from Central Siberia east to NE China/Sea of Ohkotsk, and south to the Altai Mountains, through Mongolia to central China. It is almost totally migratory and winters from the Himalayan foothills and NE India east through southern/SE China to the Pacific and south to Myanmar, and northern Cambodia and Vietnam, plus Hainan and the Andaman Isles.

Dusky Warbler is a rare but increasingly frequent vagrant to Britain and was no longer classed as BBRC description species from the end of 2005, by which time 310 had been recorded in Britain, with 64 of these in Scotland. The species remains a SBRC description species (though now judged locally in the Northern Isles) with 121 accepted records in Scotland to the end of 2018.

The species tends to occur in the latter half of the autumn, with the vast majority on the Northern Isles, but with records on the east coast from NE Scotland to Borders, and two on the Outer Hebrides. In recent years the autumn window of occurrence has seen find dates from 26 September to 13 November. Numbers are generally increasing, but annual totals vary widely from 16 in 2016, nine in 2017, and one in 2018. 2020 proved another big year with about a dozen reported, with the three birds above, and one at Balcomie, Fife Ness, Fife on 6 October already assessed and accepted by SBRC.

National Honey-buzzard survey 2020–2021: a Scottish update

C.J. MCINERNY, C. MILLER & K.D. SHAW

Plate 82. Male Honey-buzzard, Dumfries & Galloway, August 2020. A strikingly pale and beautiful individual. © *Angus Hogg*

During 2020, a British-wide national survey of Honey-buzzards was organised under the auspices of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP), coordinated by Rob Clements in England, Steve Roberts in Wales, and by the three of us in Scotland. In Scotland, this revealed Honey-buzzards on territory in new regions of the country and in higher numbers than previously recorded. Here we present a summary of the 2020 survey year, which we hope will encourage SOC members to search for this bird of prey during 2021, the second and final year of the national survey.

Honey-buzzards arrive in Scotland from mid-May on breeding territories from their sub-Saharan winter grounds. Eighty-five observers throughout the country searched for the species in 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented travel and surveying until early June, when the Scottish Government gave dispensation for raptor monitoring and protection. Over the next four months until early September observers searched for Honey-buzzards across Scotland with some striking successes, and 50 territories were identified from Highland to Dumfries & Galloway (Plate 82). The Scottish total compares favourably with the rest of Britain, where 69 territories were observed. Thus the British 2020 total was 119 territories, an increase from the 69 identified in the previous national survey during 2000, and this compares to a five year mean of 39 territories reported to the RBBP to 2017. Because of the limitations created by the COVID-19 travel restrictions at the start of the season, it was decided to extend the survey to 2021. With the recent positive news of the development of a COVID-19 vaccine, it is hoped that travel will be unrestricted. We hope that this summary will inspire readers of *Scottish Birds* to look for the species in 2021 and report any observations either directly to ourselves or through their local recorders and raptor study groups. If anyone would like to contribute to the 2021 survey, please contact us by email and we will allocate you an area.

We thank the 85 observers who completed the 2020 Scottish survey work. To support the survey, CJMcI received a travel grant from the Glasgow Natural History Society, Professor Blodwen Lloyd Binns Bequest, and KDS received a travel grant from the SOC.

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SCOTTISH BIRD SIGHTINGS

1 October to 31 December 2020

S.L. RIVERS

Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ayrs; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

Whether the COVID-19 lockdown measures played a part or not, autumn 2020 proved to be one of the best ever for rare and scarce species. An amazing run of rarities occurred, with October providing first records in Argyll and Highland, and second and third records for the Outer Hebrides. Firsts, seconds and thirds continued to be the theme in November with a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, a Hudsonian Godwit, and a Crag Martin leading the way.

Grey-bellied Brant: a bird showing characteristics of this form was at Munlochy Bay/Culloden (High) from 6 October into 2021, and two at Nairn (M&N) from 14 November to 6 December. **Todd's Canada Goose (form *interior*):** two were east of Inverness Airport (High) on 15 October; singles at Loaningfoot (D&G) on 16 October; on Islay (Arg) from 18 October to 17 December; at Munlochy Bay (High) on 19–21 October; at Balephetrish/Ruaig, Tiree (Arg) from 5 November to 22 December, and at Kennovay on 30 December; two near Campbeltown (Arg) on 7 November; near Torrance (Clyde) on 7–8th; at Loch of Skene (NES) on 29 November and at New Deer (NES) on 19 December. **Cackling Goose:** two were at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 3 October, and two at Loch Paible, North Uist (OH) on 10–12 October. **Snow Goose:** two were on South Ronaldsay (Ork) from September to 6 October, with one still to 17th; an intermediate morph was at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 5–7 October, and Nigg Bay (High) on 12–15 October; two white morphs at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 6–7 November, and Cambus/Fallin (UF) on 12–13 November, and one at Muirton, near Cromarty (High) on 19 November. **Taiga Bean Goose:** the Slammannan flock (Clyde/UF) peaked at 126 in November, and 180 in early December. **Tundra Bean Goose:** two were on Foula (Shet) on 5–6 October; two at Munlochy Bay (High) on 7–9 October; singles on Fetlar (Shet) on 14th, and Dunbar (Loth) on 18 October; at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) on 6 November; on Fair Isle from 17 November to 16 December, two at Drem (Loth) on 22 December, and at Evelix, near Dornoch (High) on 28 December. **Egyptian Goose:** one was at Fleck, Mainland (Shet) on 23–29 December, and one at Loch of the Lowes SWT Reserve (P&K) on 30 December to 1 January 2021. **Ruddy Shelduck:** one was again at Fail Loch, Tarbolton (Ayrs) on 15 October, with presumed same at Martnaham Loch (Ayr) from 27 November into 2021, and one at Dingwall (High) on 28 December.

Blue-winged Teal: four were still at Loch Mor, Baleshare, North Uist (OH) from September to 17 October, and two still at Eoligarry Floods, Barra (OH) to 4 October. **American Wigeon:** a returning drake was at Loch Watten (Caith) from 18 October into 2021; a drake at Bridgend, Islay (Arg) from 27 October to 8 November; a drake was at Loch Oire, near Elgin (M&N) on 28 November; one at Loch of Harray, Mainland (Ork) on 12 December; at Drumancroy, near Portmahomack (High) on 13 December, and one at Loch Aileodair, North Uist (OH) on 23 December. **Black Duck:** the regular adult drake at Strontian (High) was present throughout the period. **Green-winged Teal:** drakes were at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 25–26 October; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 26 October to 25 November; at Loch a'Phuil, Tiree (Arg) from 2–12 November; at Denfind Pond, Monikie (A&D) on 3 November; at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 6–19 November; at Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) from 15 November to 8th and 28 December; at Tain Links (High) from 14 December into 2021; at Coot Loch, Benbecula (OH) on 15–23 December, and one at Loch of Skaill, Mainland (Ork) on 30 December. **Ring-necked Duck:** a first-winter was still at Loch a' Phuil/Balephuil, Tiree (Arg) to 13 October; a female was at Loch of Houlland, Mainland (Shet) on 12–13 October; a drake and a female were at Treadwell Loch, Papa Westray (Ork) from 28 October to 1 November; a female was at Loch Bhasapol/Loch a' Phuil, Tiree from 30 October to 19 November, with a drake also present on 19th, and three there from 25 November to 1 December; a drake at Balgavies Loch (A&D) on 21–22 November; a drake at Kilmardinny Loch, Glasgow (Clyde) from 27 November to 4 December and again on 10–11th; a female at Cameron Reservoir (Fife)

from 28 November to 21 December, with two there from 30 December; a drake was at Loch na Bo (M&N) from 28 November to 4 December; a drake was at Acharacle, Loch Shiel (High) from 2 December into 2021; a drake at Kinghorn Loch (Fife) on 6–23 December; with the same bird nearby at Beveridge Park, Kirkcaldy (Fife) intermittently from 9 December; one at Mugdock Loch, Milngavie (Clyde) on 15–17th; two females were at Loch Bhasapol from 15 December into 2021, and a drake at Loch a'Phuil, Tiree from 15 December into 2021; two were on Belston Loch, near Drongan (Ayrs) on 17–19th, and one on at Martnaham Loch (Ayrs) on 22–23 December. **Lesser Scaup:** one was at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 15–24 November. **King Eider:** the presumed returning drake was still at Burghead Bay (M&N) to 19 October and on 10 November, and a drake flew past Nairn (M&N) on 7 December. **Surf Scoter:** single adult drakes were off Musselburgh/Fisherrow/Joppa (Loth) from September into 2021; at Lunan Bay (A&D) on 1–13 October; off the Unst–Yell ferry/Belmont, Unst (Shet) on 4–7 October; off Blackdog (NES) on 13–17th; two off Kinshaldy (Fife) on 21st; one off Dornoch (High) on 21–28 October, with two from 6 November to 28 December; off Luskentyre, Harris (OH) on 2–10 November; two at Gosford Bay (Loth) on 6 November; off Hatston Pier, Kirkwall (Ork) from 7 November into 2021, and off Yellowcraig (Loth) on 11 November. **White-winged Scoter:** the returning drake was off Musselburgh/Fisherrow (Loth) on-and-off from 27 October to 27 December.

White-billed Diver: singles were off Hestingott, Mainland (Shet) on 2 October; flew past Mull Head, Papa Westray (Ork) on 17 October; at South Nesting Bay, Mainland (Shet) on 18–27 October, with two there on 27th; off Collieston (NES) on 20 October; one off Mull Head, Papa Westray on 1 November, five there on 2nd, with three still on 4–16th, and one to 24 November; at Bay of Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 6 November; at South Nesting Bay from 24 November to 3 December, and two there on 30–31 December; four flew past Mull Head, Papa Westray on 26 November, with six past on 28th, four on 29th, seven on 30 November & 1 December, and again on 15 December; one off Churchill Barrier No.4, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 26 December; one in Bluemull Sound, Yell/Unst (Shet) and off Ramnageo/Uyeasound, Unst on 30 December.

Pied-billed Grebe: the returning adult male was still at Loch Feorlin, near Lochgilphead (Arg) to 6 November. **Glossy Ibis:** singles were at Tayport (Fife) on 16 October; at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 24–25 November, then at Haroldswick, Unst from 26 November to 1 December, and at Crook of Baldoon (D&G) on 22 December. **Spoonbill:** one was still at Montrose Basin SWT Reserve on 1 October; one at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 21–25 October and 7 November. **Cattle Egret:** one was at Carbarns Pool (Clyde) on 25 October; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) again on 12–13 November and 23 December - first record for NE Scotland, and at Loch Thom (Clyde) on 16 November. **Great White Egret:** about 12 seen in October from Shetland to Borders and D&G, all singles except for two at Wigtown Bay (D&G) on 18th. Up to five in November, long-stayers at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) to 18th; and at Montrose Basin (A&D) to 19 December, one or more near Moffat (D&G) on 14th; at Caerlaverock SWT Reserve (D&G) on 15th, and at Brow Well (D&G) on 19 November. Then singles at Haddington (Loth) on 3 December, and at Dunoon, Isle of Bute (Arg) on 16 December. **Honey-buzzard:** one flew over Dales Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 1 October. **Pallid Harrier:** a juvenile was at Ollaberry, Mainland (Shet) on 11 October; one at Laxo, Mainland (Shet) on 24 November, and one (or hybrid) over Kergord, Mainland (Shet) on 10 December. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was over Crovie, near Gardenstown (NES) on 13 October; one at Little Balloch Hill, near Dufftown (High) on 7–8 December, and one at Scaut Hill, near Cabrach (M&N) on 23 December. **Spotted Crake:** one was on Fair Isle on 1 October, and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 4 October. **Common Crane:** seven flew over Gourdon (NES) on 7 October.

Stone Curlew: one flew over Noss Head (High) on 6 October. **Pacific Golden Plover:** a first-year was at Findhorn Bay (M&N) from 10 October into 2021. **American Golden Plover:** adults were at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) from September to 1 October; at Skellister, Mainland (Shet) on 3 October; at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 4 October; at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) 5–6th; at West Gerinish, South Uist on 9–12th, with another there on 23rd; at Camb, Yell (Shet) on 17th; at Baltasound, Unst on 22nd; at Uyeasound, Unst on 27–29th; at Eochar, South Uist on 27th; at Crossapol, Tiree (Arg) on 4–5 November; at Loch 'a Phuil, Tiree on 9 November; at Uyeasound, Unst on 15 November, and at Balgarva, South Uist on 29 December into 2021. **Hudsonian Godwit:** a first-year was at the River Eden/Guardbridge (Fife) from 3 November to 17 December - the second record for Scotland. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** singles were on Papa Westray (Ork) on 1 October; at Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 25 October, and at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 28 October. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** one was still at Carnwath (Clyde) on 1 October, and singles were at Loch of Benston, South Nesting (Shet) on 4 October; at Loch of Funzie, Fetlar (Shet) on 5th; at West Gerinish, South Uist (OH) on

8–18th; at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 24 October; at Ormiclate, South Uist on 24th, and at Balgarva, South Uist on 28 October. **Long-billed Dowitcher:** one was at Loch of Tankerness, Mainland (Ork) on 15 November. **Spotted Sandpiper:** one was at Croy, near Maidens (Ayrs) on 16–19 October. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** singles were at Hougharry, South Uist (OH) on 27 October, and at Ardivachar/Eochar machair, South Uist on 7–23 December.

Sabine's Gull: an adult lingered at Ullapool bird from August to 7 October; one was off Caliach Point, Mull (Arg) on 8 October, and one was at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 26 October. **Bonaparte's Gull:** one was at Otter Ferry (Arg) on 17–18 December. **Mediterranean Gull:** much under-reported away from the Firth of Forth, the second-winter bird was still present at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) to 2 October. **Yellow-legged Gull:** an adult was at Balgray Reservoir (Clyde) on 11 November, and a third-winter in the roost there on 3rd, 11th, 20th, 22nd and 28 December. **White-winged Black Tern:** a juvenile was at The Wig/Cairnryan, Loch Ryan (D&G) on 7–18 October. **Black Tern:** one was at Thurso Bay, Thurso (Caith) on 5 October. **Pomarine Skua:** at least 27 in October from Shetland to Lothian and Argyll, mostly singles but with six south past Brora (High) on 19th. About 12 in November, mostly in the Northern Isles but also singles in Aberdeenshire and Ayrshire, and high counts of three past Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 9th and 10th. Two flew south past Girdleness, Aberdeen (NES) and one past Scoughall (Loth) on 5 December; one past St.Andrew's (Fife) on 11th and one past Brora on 13 December. **Long-tailed Skua:** just three reports, all singles - over Ferryhills (Fife) on 4 October; past Tiumpan Head, Lewis (OH) on 18 October, and past Ardvule Point, South Uist (OH) on 21 November.

European Turtle Dove: singles were at Voltas, Lewis (OH) on 1 October; at Culkein (High) on 2 October; on Out Skerries (Shet) on 2–12th; at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 3–8th; at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 4th; two on Trondra (Shet) on 4th, with one still on 5th; singles at Hillswick, Mainland (Shet) on 6th; at Great Bernera, Lewis on 6th; at Isbister, Whalsay (Shet) on 9–10th; at Paiblesgarry, North Uist (OH) on 9th; at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 14th, and at Hillswick on 23 October. **Snowy Owl:** an adult female was still on Hirta, St. Kilda (OH) to 11 December, and an adult male still at Ronas Hill /Collafirth, Mainland (Shet) to 18 October. **European Nightjar:** one was at Mull Head, Papa Westray (Ork) on 2 October. **Hoopoe:** one was still at Bridgend, Islay (Arg) from September to 8th and 23 October; singles were on Sanday (Ork) on 2 October; at Dornoch (High) on 6–24th; at Pittodrie, Aberdeen (NES) on 9–14th; at Grange Crossroads (M&N) on 12th; at Rora (NES) on 20th; at Gilston (M&N) on 25th, and at Mains of Cluggieden, Clatt (NES) on 25 October. **Wryneck:** singles were at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 4 October, and at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 9 October. **Hobby:** a juvenile was at Kilmany (Fife) on 1 October; a juvenile at Maywick, Mainland (Shet) on 3 October; one near Collieston (NES) on 6 October; one at Cruden Bay (NES) on 10 October, and an adult at Ardfin, Jura (Arg) on 18 October.

Brown Shrike: a first-winter was on Yell (Shet) on 12 October; one on Fair Isle on 15 October, and a first-winter at Port Nis, Lewis (OH) on 6–10 November. **Red-backed Shrike:** one was still on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from September to 2 October; and singles at Boddam, Mainland (Shet) on 2–10 October; at Rattray Head (NES) on 2–4 October; at Lamba Ness, Unst (Shet) on 2–3rd; at Tresta, Mainland (Shet) on 5th; at Easter Quarff, Mainland (Shet) on 5th; at Westing, Unst (Shet) on 6th; on North Ronaldsay on 7–9th, with two on 8th; at Houbie, Fetlar

Plate 83. Hudsonian Godwit (landing), Eden Estuary, Fife, 17 December 2020. © *Mark Wilkinson*

(Shet) on 9–11th; on Stronsay (Ork) on 12th; at Kilminning (Fife) on 26–28 October, and one on Stronsay on 3 November. **Isabelline Shrike:** a first-winter (probable Daurian) was at Burravoe, Yell (Shet) on 10 November. **Great Grey Shrike:** singles were at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 2nd and 6–9 October; at Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 2–8 October; at Burrafirth, Stove and Ungirsta, all Unst (Shet) on 6th; at Cleat, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7th; at Bakkasetter, Mainland (Shet) on 8th; at Marrister, Whalsay (Shet) on 17–19th; at Baltasound/Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 1–3 November; at Croabh Haven (Arg) on 7 November; at Skaw, Whalsay on 19th; at Knockaneorn, near Cawdor (High) on 17th; at Backwater Reservoir (A&D) from 28 November into 2021. **Woodchat Shrike:** a first-year was at Bragar, Lewis (OH) on 2–3 October. **Bohemian Waxwing:** a poor showing - first of the autumn was one at Maywick, Mainland (Shet) on 12 October, with just over 20 noted by the end of the month, including eight at Castletown (Caith) on 22 October. About 25 in November from Shetland to Lothian, with peaks of four at Morrison's, Arbroath (A&D) on 7th and seven in Lossiemouth (M&N) on 10th. Just over 40 in December, from Shetland to Angus, with high counts of 10 at Elgin (M&N) on 10th, 20 at Forres (M&N) on 13th, and 15 at Elgin on 19th. **Woodlark:** one over-wintered on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 3 November into 2021. **Shorelark:** singles were at Sumburgh Head, Mainland (Shet) on 6–10 October; at Belhaven/Tyninghame, Dunbar (Loth) on 10–22 October, and 7 November to 3 December, and at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 28 October and 14 December. **Short-toed Lark:** singles were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5–20 October; at Everland, Fetlar (Shet) on 8–14 October; at Funzie, Fetlar (Shet) on 13–16th; on Fair Isle on 15–19th, and at Girdleness, Aberdeen (NES) on 9 November. **Crag Martin:** one at Kirkwall, Mainland (Ork) on 18 November was only the third Scottish record.

'Siberian' Chiffchaff (*P.c. tristis*): a huge influx of this form occurred in the period. At least 220 reported in October, the vast majority on the Northern Isles but south to Borders and Argyll, mostly ones and twos, but with high counts of 13 on Fair Isle on 16th; 18 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 18th, and nine at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 26th. At least 60 seen in November, from Shetland to Lothian and Barra, mostly singles, but with high counts of five at Castlebay, Barra (OH) on 5th, five at Kergord, Mainland (Shet) on 7th, and six at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 27–28th. Over 20 reported in December south as far as Lothian and Ayrshire, mostly singles, but with high counts of three at Seafield, Edinburgh (Loth) on 6th, and four at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 15th. **Dusky Warbler:** about 11 in October - on Shetland Mainland singles were at Aith on 5th; at Collafirth on 5th; at Maywick on 9th; at Quendale on 10th and 14–15th; at Sandwick on 13–17th; with other Shetland birds at Funzie, Fetlar on 17th, and Mid Yell, Yell on 21–22nd. Elsewhere one was at Balephuil, Tiree on 14th - first record for Argyll; one on Fair Isle on 14–23rd and 27 October. In November singles were at Gleann, Barra on 5–7th - the third record for the Outer Hebrides; at Red Point, near Port Henderson on 9–10th - first record for Highland, and at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 10–13th. **Radde's Warbler:** on Shetland singles were at Skaw, Whalsay on 1–3 October; on Foula on 1 October; at Rerwick, Mainland on 2–3rd; at Pool of Virkie, Mainland on 3rd; at Cunningsburgh, Mainland on 4th; at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland on 4th; Isbister, Mainland and Tresta, Mainland on 9th; at Culswick Marsh, Mainland on 26th; at Loch of Clickimin on 29–30 October, and at Norwick, Unst on 10 November. Elsewhere one was at Duncansby Head (Caith) on 6–8th, with two there on 7 October. **Pallas's Leaf Warbler:** one was at Girdleness, Aberdeen (NES) on 6–7 October; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6th and 14 October; at Holland, Papa Westray on 7–9th; at Duncansby Head (Caith) on 7th; at Buddabrake, Unst (Shet) on 10th; at Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 11th; at Collieston (NES) on 14th; at Dowlaw (Bord) on 14–18th, and at St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 15th. **Yellow-browed Warbler:** the exceptional influx continued, involving well over 1,000 birds in October, mostly in the Northern Isles, but noted south to Borders, Perth and Clyde. Higher counts included 15 on Foula (Shet) on 1st; 17 at Balnakeil (High) 2nd; 21 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2nd; 15 on Fair Isle on 2nd; 100+ on Barra (OH) and 14+ on North Uist (OH) on 3rd; 16 on the Isle of May on 3rd; 18 at St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 4 October; 11 on Rhum (High) on 5th, and 12+ on Tiree (Arg) on 10th. Up to 20 in November (to 17th), all singles, from Shetland to Aberdeen and Tiree, and a very late single was at Breibhig, Barra on 16 December. **Hume's Warbler:** singles were at Stove, Mainland (Shet) on 12 October; at Aith, Mainland (Shet) on 18 October; at East Denwick Plantation, Deerness, Mainland (Ork) from 26 October to 6 November, and near Balephuil, Tiree (Arg) on 3 November - the first for Argyll. **Arctic Warbler:** singles were at Gutcher/Cullivoe, Yell (Shet) on 1–4 October; at Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 5–6 October, and at Fife Ness (Fife) on 6th & 8th October. **Great Reed Warbler:** one was at Burn of Silverdale, Unst (Shet) on 9 October. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** singles were at North Roe, Mainland (Shet) on 1 October; at Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 1 October; at Ellister, Mainland (Shet) on 2nd; at St. Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2–5th; at Scousburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 3rd; at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (SHet) on 5th; at North Loch, Sanday (Ork) on 5th; at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 6th; at Fife Ness (Fife) on 8th,

and at Spiggie, Mainland on 8–16 October. **Marsh Warbler:** one was at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 5 October. **Booted Warbler:** one was at Callernish House, North Uist (OH) from 30 September to 1 October, and one on Fair Isle on 2 October. **Melodious Warbler:** one was at Burrastow, Mainland (Shet) on 5 October. **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler:** a juvenile was at Burrafirth, Unst (Shet) on 1–2 October; one at Hametoun Burn, Foula (Shet) on 2–4 October; one at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 3–6th, and on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7–8 October. **Lanceolated Warbler:** singles were at Biggings, Foula (Shet) on 1 October; at Sumburgh Head, Mainland (Shet) on 2–3 October; at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 9th; at Burns, Foula on 10th; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 14 October, and at Aith, Mainland (Shet) on 16–17 October. **Barred Warbler:** in October just over 30 were noted on the Northern Isles and 10 on the Outer Hebrides. Elsewhere in October singles were seen at Craig David Croft, Inverbervie (NES) on 2nd; on the Isle of May on 3rd; at Rattray Head (NES) on 4th; at John o' Groats (Caith) on 4th; at Noss Head, near Wick (Caith) on 5th; at Dowlaw (Bord) on 7th, and at Tarbat Ness (High) on 7–8 October. One was at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 7 November. **'Siberian' Lesser Whitethroat (*S.c.blythi*):** a large influx accompanied the other eastern vagrants reaching Scotland in October/November - much under-reported, and requiring DNA-analysis to confirm identity - well over 100 individuals may have been involved. **Western Orphean Warbler:** a male was at Lothbeg Point, near Brora (High) on 10–11 October - the first confirmed record for mainland Scotland. **Firecrest:** singles were at Inverewe Garden, near Poolewe (High) on 6 October; at St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 16–21 October; at Dowlaw Dean (Bord) on 16 October; at Mid Yell, Yell (Shet) on 8 November; at Collieston (NES) on 9 November; at Red Point, Port Henderson (High) on 9–10 November, and at Balephuil, Tiree (Arg) on 9–15 November. **Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** one was at 'The Manse', Cuithir, Barra (OH) on 12–19th and 25–26 November - the first British record. **Rose-coloured Starling:** a juvenile was at Eswick, Mainland (Shet) on 3 October; one at Breckon, Yell (Shet) on 4–6 October; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6th; at Lochmaddy, North Uist (OH) on 19th; at Bowmore, Islay (Arg) on 19–28 October, and at Duror, near Glencoe (High) on 1 November. **Siberian Thrush:** the female was still at Kilminning, Fife Ness (Fife) from 30 September into October - the first record for the Scottish Mainland. **White's Thrush:** singles were at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 1–2 October; on Fair Isle on 1 October; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2nd; at Gleann, Barra (OH) on 8th; on Stronsay (Ork) on 15th, and at Gulberwick, Mainland (Shet) on 25 October. **Eyebrowed Thrush:** a first-year male was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2–8 October; one at Burravoe, Mainland (Shet) on 7 October, and one at Houbie, Fetlar (Shet) on 7 October. **Bluethroat:** about 42 in October, all on the Northern Isles, except for one near Manse, Hirta, St. Kilda (OH) on 22nd. One was on Fair Isle on 4 November. **Red-flanked Bluetail:** singles were at Whitehowe, Papa Westray (Ork) on

Plate 84. Eyebrowed Thrush, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 7 October 2020. © *Mark Rayment*

3 October; at Duncansby Head (Caith) on 4 October; at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 6th; at Marwick, Mainland (Ork) on 7th; at Birsay, Mainland (Ork) on 7–8th; at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 10th; at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 12–17th; on Fair Isle on 14–16th, and at Creachan woodland, Barra on 17–26 October - the second for the Outer Hebrides. **Red-breasted Flycatcher**: about 35 in October, virtually all singles on the Northern Isles, with a high count of five on Fair Isle on 2nd. Elsewhere singles were at Fife Ness (Fife) on 4th; at St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 5th, and at North Loch Eynort, South Uist (OH) on 9 October.

'Eastern' Stonechat sp.: at least 10 were on the Northern Isles in October. **Eastern Yellow Wagtail:** one was at Sandvoe, Mainland (Shet) on 5 October, and one on Eigg (High) on 27–30 October. **Citrine Wagtail:** one was still on Fair Isle to 8 October; singles were at Norby and Skeld (both Mainland Shet) on 4 October, and one at the Beach Ballroom, Aberdeen (NES) on 6 October. **Richard's Pipit:** in October about 10 were on the Northern Isles, with singles elsewhere at Cotehill Loch/Foveran (NES) on 30 October to 3 November, with one at Ruddons Point (Fife) on 28–29 November. **Olive-backed Pipit:** over 20 were on the Northern Isles in October; with singles elsewhere at Rattray Head (NES) on 4–5th, and at Blackdog (NES) on 4 October. One was on Fair Isle in early November. **Red-throated Pipit:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1–11 October, with two on 3rd and 6th; singles at Breckon, Yell (Shet) on 3 October; at Gulberwick, Mainland (Shet) on 4th; at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 4th; at Sumburgh Farm, Mainland (Shet) on 5–6th; at Out Head, St. Andrews (Fife) on 8th; at Muness, Unst (Shet) on 12th, and on Fair Isle on 14–22 October. **American Buff-bellied Pipit:** singles were at Rubh' Arnal, North Uist (OH) on 7 October; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10–11 October, and on Fair Isle on 28 October. **Common Rosefinch:** one was still at Kilminning, Fife Ness (Fife) from September to 5 October. Over 25 were on the Northern Isles in October, with high counts of three on Foula (Shet) on 1st, and two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 8th and 18 October, and one was on the Isle of May on 2nd. One was at Ham, Foula on 6 November. **Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll:** in October singles were on Foula (Shet) on 1–5th; on Fair Isle on 1–9th; at Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 6th; at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 9th and 19–22nd, with four there on 29th; at Baltasound, Unst on 14–15th, with two there on 22nd, and near Norby, Mainland (Shet) on 22 October. One was still at Baltasound on 10 November. **Coue's Arctic Redpoll (form *exilipes*):** singles were at Burrafirth, Unst (Shet) on 1 October; at Norwick, Unst on 9–22 October; at Burravoe, Mainland (Shet) on 22nd; at Baltasound, Unst on 23rd, and at Mid Yell, Yell (Shet) on 28 October. **Arctic Redpoll:** birds not identified to race were one at Sandness, Mainland (Shet) on 17 October, and one at Rousay (Ork) on 5 November. **Parrot Crossbill:** two were at Cotehill Loch (NES) on 1 October, and one at Sullom Plantation, Mainland (Shet) on 16 October.

Tennessee Warbler: one at Burravoe, Yell (Shet) from 29 September to 7 October was only the fifth Scottish and British record. **Blackpoll Warbler:** one was at Aith, Mainland (Shet) on 16–29 October. **Pine Bunting:** a female was at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 20–22 October, and a male at Balephuil, Tiree on 29 November - the first for Argyll. **Ortolan Bunting:** singles were at Papil Water, Fetlar (Shet) on 3–6 October; at Tresta, Mainland (Shet) on 5 October; at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 7th, and at Sumburgh Farm, Mainland (Shet) on 10 October. **Little Bunting:** over 60 noted in October, virtually all in the Northern Isles, with high counts of four on Fair Isle on 5–8th, but with singles at Collieston (NES) on 3rd; at Eoligarry Church, Barra (OH) on 6th, and at Troup Head (NES) on 7th. In November there were singles at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) from 8th into 2021, and Tresta, Mainland (Shet) on 12th, with one at Weisdale, Mainland (Shet) on 10 December. **Rustic Bunting:** singles were on Fair Isle from September to 3 October, with two on 1 October; at Collieston (NES) on 3–6 October, with two there on 4–5th; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 3–5th, with two there on 6th; on Out Skerries (Shet) on 6th; one at Stove, Sanday (Ork) on 6th, and one at Sandness, Mainland (Shet) on 7 October. One at Kingsbarns on 7 December is potentially the first record for Fife. **Black-headed Bunting:** one was at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 28 October. **Lapland Bunting:** an excellent showing, with over 160 seen in October, mostly on the Northern and Western Isles, but noted south to Ayrshire and Borders. Generally ones and twos, but with higher counts of 17 at Muness, Unst (Shet) on 5th, with 26 there on 8th, and 15 at Grenitote, North Uist on 14th, and at Ardivachar Point, South Uist (OH) on 17th. About 23 reported in November, with a high count of 12 at Scoughall (Loth) on 27th. Over 40 noted in December, with a peak of 16 at Boarhills (Fife) on 12th. **Snow Bunting:** good numbers were reported, with over 280 in October, over 400 in November, and over 550 in December, mostly from the Northern Isles, but also south to Borders and Ayrshire. High counts included 26 On Papa Westray (Ork) on 2 October; 85 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 14 October; 37 on Out Skerries (Shet) on 16th; 33 on Fair Isle on 29 October; 40 at Rattray Head (NES) on 23rd; 81 at Tentsmuir Point NNR (Fife) on 27 November; 130 at Coire Cas, Cairngorm (High) on 2 December; 96 at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 15 December, and 60 at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 28 December.

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Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation **SC 009859**

PhotoSPOT

Plate 85. Being fortunate enough to live near Dalzell Estate in Motherwell, my habit is to carry my camera with me on my daily walks there, enabling me to indulge my passion for photographing the wildlife and, at the same time, simply watch them going about their daily lives and their struggles for survival and the continuation of their species.

This nest is situated in an old Oak tree and has been used by Starlings for the past three years. This year past, the tree also housed a Treecreeper nest, situated barely two metres away from the Starling nest, which surprised me, given the rowdy behaviour of the Starlings and the almost silent behaviour of the Treecreepers - unlikely bedfellows indeed!

In April of last year, I was fortunate enough to take this image of one of the adult birds engaged in lining the nest with what looked like a mixture of grasses and small twigs and then, to watch the young being fed by the parents and, ultimately, fledging.

Given the nature of the nest opening, I suspect that, at some point in the past, the tree has also housed a Great Spotted Woodpecker nest.

Sadly, this circle of life will not be repeated, as the tree, presumably, and, if so, erroneously, considered to be dead by our local council parks department, was cut down a few months ago and only a sad stump remains to remind me of the life which once inhabited it and gave me such enormous pleasure.

Equipment used: Sony ILCE-7RM4, 600 mm lens, Aperture Priority, ISO 1250, 1/1000 sec, f6.3.

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